

“I am not a Tree with my Root in the Soil’: Ecofeminist Revisions of the Tree/Root Dialectics in Sylvia Plath’s Poetry”

Irena Ragaišienė (Vytautas Magnus University)¹

Abstract

Drawing on ecofeminist theories, the paper argues that Sylvia Plath’s poetic vision is often captured by the dialectics between the tree and its roots, a dialectics which encodes the integrative powers of the tree to unite opposites, and which thus embodies a potential for relocation of oppositional dualities that structure Western thought. The argument integrates a critical response to Ted Hughes’s vision of Plath’s poetic foliage, which he presents in terms of a hierarchical comparison to that of established male literary figures. It is claimed that such a phallogocentric perspective on a woman poet’s relationship to the poetic tradition is embedded in envisioning woman’s relationship to culture in terms of the nature/culture dualism. Continuing this line of argument, it is highlighted that the lack of empowering models of female literary predecessors cause gender ambivalence in a woman creator, which in turn generates a self-depreciative attitude to the aesthetic value of her art. The analyzed poems reveal the intensity of depleting self-doubt and dependence on the approval on those who judge her art (or the muse). What emerges from Plath’s poetic exploration of the gender meanings of the tree metaphor is that the dialogue with Nature, which occurs within the context of the male-dominant literary tradition, contains an implicit negotiation with dominant discourses, which unavoidably shape woman’s self-identification within the nature/culture dualism, and instigates an effort to re-imagine conventional significations. It is maintained that a re-vision of Plath’s poetic elaborations of the tree and root in light of ecofeminist tenets offers a locus for the relocation of nature/culture hierarchies and a delineation of potentialities for alternative visions.

Introduction

Sylvia Plath’s poetic representation of the tree and its roots marks a considerable part of her work with regard as to how the significations surrounding this trope make it stand out in “the closed gardens of art,” to use Timothy Webb’s metaphor for the literary tradition (Webb xxii). Whether emblematic of originality, poetic achievement

¹ Irena Ragaišienė, Dept of English Philology, Vytautas Magnus University, 58 K. Donelaičio Street Kaunas, Lithuania 44248 i.ragaisiene@hmf.vdu.lt

or an inscription of a struggle, as per Liz Yorke, “to bring to language, to the stage of representation, the suffering, frightened, despairing, desiring, lustful, ranging, *vengeful* woman” (Yorke 51), Plath’s “flawed gardens,” as the poet designates the tree/root iconography in “Firesong” (Plath, *Collected Poems* 30), embody a narrative of self-formation within a hostile milieu.

Thus taken, perhaps it is no accident that Ted Hughes envisions Plath’s creative endeavor as concentrated on an effort to exfoliate her tree of poetry:

Few poets have disclosed in any way the birth circumstances of their poetic gift, or the necessary purpose these serve in their psychic economy. It is not easy to name one. As if the first concern of poetry were to cover its own tracks. When a deliberate attempt to reveal all has been made by a Pasternak or a Wordsworth, the result is discursive autobiography—illuminating enough, but not an X ray. Otherwise poets are very properly bent on exploring subject matter, themes, intellectual possibilities and modifications, evolving the foliage and blossoms and fruit of a natural cultural organism whose roots are hidden, and whose birth and private purpose are no part of the crop. Sylvia Plath’s poetry, like a species of its own, exists in little else but the revelation of that birth and purpose. Though her whole considerable ambition was fixed on becoming the normal flowering and fruiting kind of writer, her work was roots only. Almost as if her entire oeuvre were enclosed within those processes and transformations that happen in other poets before they can even begin, before the muse can hold out a leaf. (Hughes 110)

The perception of Plath’s work by Hughes, as “roots only,” emphasizes that the search for a literary and personal identity are two interrelated branches of a tree whose root, as Plath’s speaker states in “I am Vertical,” is not “in the soil” (Plath, *Collected Poems* 162), i.e. not in a habitat suitable for progressive development. This brings into focus the problem of relating the tree and the root to other constellations such as personal development, the social/natural environment and the literary tradition. It is true that a number of Plath’s poems link the investigation of roots, as a lineage of her descent and as a potential core of her personality, with a continuous effort to investigate the roots of the imagination. A continuous introspective study of herself may have been stimulated by her sense of rootlessness at the death of the father, a painful experience that led to a feeling of abandonment and alienation from the world.¹

Plath’s obsession with the tree and the root suggests that she was entangled in the chaos of the unconscious (symbolically represented by roots) and never realized the kind of harmonious self signified by the full-grown tree.² The imprisonment in roots, which hinder affirmation of the self, evokes a parallel with a Grimm tale that describes the evil spirit confined under a tree. It is as though the key to her personality had been hidden away by a willful magician.³ Since the roots lie where the imprisoned self is languishing, a preoccupation with origins can only impede individual realization of self-knowledge. However, Hughes’s claim that her investigation of roots held Plath’s imagination in thrall and prevented her from becoming “the normal flowering and fruiting kind of writer” ignores the standards of *normalcy* operative in a male-dominant culture and literary tradition. For centuries, writing has not been regarded as a *normal* or *natural* activity for women, and that may still be true. Pamela Di Pesa reminds us that “[w]omen poets, like women painters and composers, have long been considered anomalous” because engagement in artistic creativity has been equated with “doing something unnatural”

for the female and with “a neurotic avoidance of her natural role” (Pesa 59, 65). The tree, then, a Romantic image symbolizing poetry or a work of art, cannot possibly flourish as a “natural cultural organism” because a woman writer may see such terms as “natural” and “cultural” not as equivalents, but as opposites—natural or cultural.

This paper takes Ted Hughes’s depiction of Sylvia Plath’s creative endeavour in terms of the tree/root dialectics as a starting point for an ecofeminist analysis of its signifying spectrum, one that emerges in Plath’s texts as a revisionist reworking of culturally determined meanings associated with this trope. Complexes of signification that point to the integrative quality of the tree and its ability to merge dialectical opposites are exposed to call into question the hierarchical treatment of nature and culture that the spatial opposites of roots versus branches encode. The dialectics between the tree and its roots, then, provides a locus for the investigation of woman’s self-identification within the nature/culture dualism and allows a probing into the meanings of the “natural.”

Approaching Plath’s writing from an ecosensitive perspective challenges “the tendency to read her poems as a psychobiographical narrative of self-discovery,” to use Christina Britzolakis’s phrasing (Britzolakis 108), or to treat it just as a reflection of a troubled self read as “contours of psychic landscapes” (Lindberg-Seyersted 39). The redirection of critical lenses from the focus on inner reality to the outside forces that shape it, enables one, as Peter Barry has it, “to turn the conventional manner of reading inside out,” a move which in effect constitutes a “refusal to privilege the inner over the outer” (Barry 259). This is to say that environment/nature is not treated here as a mere site for the generation of metaphors defining psychic states but as a textual practice and material referent in the terms described by Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer (Gersdorf & Mayer 11). This allows us to explore the relationship between modes of representation of the tree/root dialectics in Plath’s texts and the material realities that shape the perception of this trope.

Therefore, for the purposes of the present discussion, selected tenets of ecofeminist theory will be presented. These ecofeminist insights are chosen in response to Ted Hughes’s depiction of the development of Plath’s writing career in terms that reinforce the nature/culture opposition. The present study also draws on ideas of Romanticism and on feminist theorizing of the muse/creator dialectics to discuss networks of meanings surrounding textual representations of this relationship in literature and culture. It is argued that, in the treatment of this hierarchical structure within the thematic framework provided by the root/tree iconography, Plath’s texts and her poetry in particular display traces of negotiation with conventional meanings inherited from culturally dominant texts. The poems chosen for the present analysis represent different periods of Plath’s writing career, with a special emphasis on the analysis of “Polly’s Tree” (Plath, *Collected Poems* 128-29) and “Dark Wood, Dark Water” (127). These poems belong to *The Colossus* period, the works of which, according to Ted Hughes, serve as just preparatory material for the creative energy that gushes forth in Plath’s *Ariel* poems (Hughes 110). In the context of the tree/root iconography, the analysis aims to uncover the underlying structures that imprison the imagination. In this regard, we read Plath’s preoccupation with root/tree dialectics both as a desire to create art and a self and as a struggle with her sense of the inadequacy of her “life sap.”

Ecofeminist Re-Visions of Women, Poets, and Trees (of Poetry)

The above-quoted framing of Sylvia Plath's poetry within the thematic network underlying the obsessive analysis of roots serves as an illustration of envisioning the development of a woman poet's oeuvre in terms of a hierarchical comparison with the works of established literary figures. The reference to these figures as "a Wordsworth" and "a Pasternak" indicates that these writers are viewed as representative. Of course, we may question Hughes's choice of these two particular writers, as he could equally well have compared Sylvia Plath's writing to Hopkins's pleading "Lord, bring my roots rain," or with Roethke's "Cuttings," or "Root Cellar," which, according to Kenneth Burke, "present the vital strivings of coronated stem, severed from parental stock" (Burke 68). The question poses itself whether Hughes is drawing a parallel between Plath's struggle against the norms of her society, and a Pasternak's struggle against Stalin's regime, or a Wordsworth's one against poverty or failing inspiration. At any rate, Plath's work is unlike Wordsworth's poetry, which celebrates the powers of nature, or Pasternak's vision of poetry as a sponge-like absorbing of experience until it becomes "saturated" with meaning.⁴ Plath invested all her creative effort in wrestling with her sense of personal and creative depletion. To a great extent, this striving was affected by the limiting gender roles of the 1950s. According to Cathy Davidson, in Plath's generation, woman was turned into a cultural icon of a fertile soil perpetually bringing forth children-flowers (Davidson 190).

Read against the backdrop of ecofeminist insights, this aspect of the normative culture of the Eisenhower era presented by Davidson in a vegetative metaphor can be regarded as a manifestation of a tendency to describe women in what Karen J. Warren defines as "naturalist" language meant to justify woman's subordination. The comparison of women to different forms of nature in terms of similarities with regard to selected functions or qualities that the comparison implies serves as a basis for the "natural" alignment of women and nature. Since patriarchal culture treats nature and animals as subordinate to humans, the identification of women with nature legitimizes their inferiorization and subordination. The domination of nature and animals is validated by feminizing them while the naturalization of women legitimizes their domination by men. In a patriarchal culture, the feminization of nature presupposes that nature is put in the service of man, whose degree of humanity is determined by the capacity to exercise the power of reason/rationality. It has become a norm that "reason, or rationality, has been taken not only as the hallmark of humanness (allegedly, humans alone are rational animals) but also but also as what makes some humans superior to (some) other humans and to nonhuman animals and nature" (Warren 12-13).

In the literary tradition, the feminization of nature and naturalization of woman has been conventionalized by treating nature as a locus for experiencing a female muse. Such a hierarchically positioned relationship between the muse and the creator rests on the assumption that woman and nature, as stated by Pamela Di Pesa, "have traditionally been the symbols of the natural impulses that must be repressed." With the woman as a symbolic representation of desire and the shield that ensures an indirect contact with nature, the (male) poet not only can reflect nature, but also transcend it. Because of her "otherness," a woman poet "cannot project her ambivalence onto the opposite sex as easily as a man can" (Pesa 64). This may explain why Plath's tree of poetry impresses Hughes as producing deficient foliage resulting from the preoccupation with roots. For a woman poet, just as the notion of the muse or relationship to nature is problematic, the position in the (male-) dominated literary tradition is equally unsettling. A woman poet's creativity cannot

hence flow forth as a fountain pulsating with genuine feeling.⁵ Rather, it is reduced to a painstaking practicing and nursing of the roots of the self, which, as Hughes has observed, only prepares the ground for a creative growth. The investment of Plath's poetic effort in recording what Hughes calls the "birth and purpose" of the work of art—"those processes and transformations that happen in other poets before they can even begin"—reflects that Plath was inhibited by the norms of her culture that identified woman with nature/the (m)other rather than the creator. Within such nature/low/roots and culture/high/literary crop dynamics, as Val Plumwood would have it, "nature includes everything that reason excludes" (Plumwood 20). The analysis of the roots as a source of literary foliage (and ironically the underside of reason/culture) may be so absorbing that a woman's tree of poetry grows stunted, if it develops at all.

By referring to a work of art as "organism," Hughes evokes associations with Romantic organology. In this aesthetics, as M. H. Abrams maintains, the birth and development of the work of art is compared to the growth of a plant, in that it is "the natural, unplanned and unconscious process" (Abrams 218). The assessment of Plath's poetry through this comparative prism recalls Sylvia Mayer's statement that culturally influential discourses affect the dynamics of the relationship between culture and nature because "[l]anguage is the medium in which meaning is created, the medium that allows social groups to develop, categorize, and negotiate specific concepts of reality, the medium that has a performative function: language does not simply describe, but shapes the world." Language defines knowledge about the world and correspondingly affects the human self by positioning it in relation to linguistically determined practices (Mayer 112). Literary tradition, then, just as any other aspect of culture, is affected by "the most influential culturally formative texts," as Mayer uses the term (114). In this way, they serve as a basis for the creation of literary conventions that form in response to the hierarchical treatment of nature and culture. By extension, literature constitutes "the intertextual web" that denotes and regulates the dynamics of nature/culture dualisms in socio-cultural practices and intra-human relations at large.

This casts fresh light on the impact of discourses that Ted Hughes's discussion of Plath's creative output recalls. The treatment of it, then, as "roots only" perceived in opposition to the flourishing exfoliated poetic crop of the recognized writers, within the conceptual spatiality between the tree and the root, calls attention to what Karen J. Warren has called "value hierarchies, (i.e. perceptions of diversity organized by a spatial Up-Down metaphor, which attributes higher value (status, prestige) to that which is higher ('Up'))" (Warren 4). According to Warren, these "value hierarchies," together with "value dualisms," represent one of the "conceptual links" that "construct women and nature in male-biased ways." Another link constituting "a conceptual framework" is used to elucidate "all social 'isms of domination,' e.g., sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism as well as 'naturism,' i.e. the unjustified domination of nonhuman nature [...]" (4). The third link relates to the formation of gendered identity. It is claimed that the experience related to nurture, but not the biological factor determines woman's closer relationship to nature. This link stems from Western culture's belief that men tend to regard the world as a source of objective knowledge which they access as autonomous subjects. The differences in modes of relating to nature represent "just those value dualisms that are claimed to separate and inferiorize what is historically female-gender identified" (4).

The presentation of these theoretical perspectives constitutes the position from which the present discussion analyses the meanings of the root/tree trope with regard to the nature/culture dualism as constellated in Sylvia Plath's poetry. This selection of ecofeminist tenets illustrates Marti Kheel's definition of ecofeminism as being not a

single body of theory, but “as a number of theories or stories that, when woven together into a fabric or tapestry, help to provide a picture or ‘portrait’ of the world in which we currently live” (Kheel 244). It is the aim of the present study to expose some threads of this “tapestry” in order to counterbalance and point to potential redefinitions of the universal (male) perspective on how the relationship between nature and culture impacts women’s writing.

Ecofeminist Re-vision of the Gap between Tree and Root in Sylvia Plath’s Poetry

In view of the presented insights, Sylvia Plath’s “Polly’s Tree” (Plath, *Collected Poems* 128-129) may be regarded as exemplary of the revisionary tactics concentrated on the reconsideration of oppositional dualisms. Dualistic vision, Val Plumwood argues, “gives rise to a dualized structure of otherness and negation” for the purposes of appropriation and domination (Plumwood 42). The point which the poem makes is, as it were, that poetry is not a substitute for family/nature (“no family tree” line 29), nor is it a substitute for religion/culture (“nor // a tree of heaven” lines 30-31); rather, this particular piece represents a will toward a self-transcending vision, which is a desire to soar toward the “blue larkspur star” (line 42). And, indeed, the poem may seem to sink into baroque parody before it rises to the literally crowning vision, the “blue larkspur star,” that, in its simple yet shining beauty, lets us see that even so feeble and fabled a structure as Polly’s incongruously yet lovingly assembled dream tree may be a vehicle for transcendence. The arc crowned by the blue larkspur star appears to be the garish entrance to an amusement park where worn clichés are offered as art, ostentatious sentimentality as emotion, and shoddy extravagance as imagination. And yet, it is suggested that the seeker/dreamer/reader who is turned away by the “valentine/arc of tear-pearled/bleeding hearts on its sleeve” (lines 38-40), may not be allowed a vision of the blue flower.

Such a mode of authorship, just as in “On the Difficulty of Conjuring Up a Dryad” (Plath, *Collected Poems* 65-66) and in “On the Plethora of Dryads” (*Collected Poems* 67-68), places the author of Plath’s gendered tree outside Edward Young’s definition of the “originals,” whose work of art, according to the principals of organology, has to be “of a vegetable nature” in order to be classified as “original.” In other words, an “original” work of art “rises spontaneously from the vital root of genius; it grows, it is not made” (Young, quoted in Day 72). Thus taken, the devastating effort to transform dream/desire/nature into art/culture depicted in Plath’s poem can hardly be regarded as a manifestation of the spontaneous and involuntary birth of the seeds of art in a Divine Creator, who is endowed with and endows the imagination. Unavoidably, the overt deficiency of the tree suggested by it being just as “a thicket of sticks,/each speckled twig” (lines 2-3) aligns Polly’s dream tree with what Young classifies as “imitations.” This polar opposite of the “originals” is “often a sort of manufacture wrought up by those mechanics, art and labor, out of pre-existent materials not their own” (Young, quoted in Day 73).

If “pre-existent materials” function as “culturally formative discourses,” in the sense presented by Sylvia Mayer, a woman author may find herself excluded from these texts or (mis)represented from a phallo/anthropocentric point of view. Thus viewed, Plath’s way of recording flowers as attributes and products of the gendered tree of imagination ambiguously emblemizes associations of women with powerlessness and vanity. Nearly every branch of the dream tree attracts the eye as decorated

in a ghost flower
flat as paper and
of a color

vaporish as frost-breath,
more finical than
any silk fan

the Chinese ladies use
to stir robin's egg
air.

("Polly's Tree," Plath *Collected Poems* 128-129)

However, for its overt implications of assertiveness, even aggressiveness, the "tiger-faced/pansy" diversifies the attributes ascribed to flowers and carries them beyond the hierarchical dynamics of values associated with the dualistic vision of woman/nature as passive and man/culture as active. Val Plumwood takes issue with just this situation when she states that the identification of woman with nature and man with culture transforms itself into a different kind of opposition perpetuating a belief that men are "forceful and wild" while women are "tamed and domestic." Such a view conditioned the association of men with power and accordingly the devaluation of all "human qualities and aspects of life associated with necessity, nature and women—of nature-as-body, of nature-as-passion or emotion, of nature as the pre-symbolic, of nature-as-primitive, of nature-as-animal and of nature as the feminine" (Plumwood 20-21). The gendering of power has a negative impact both on the state of nature and on human well-being as well as gives a negative meaning to the naturalness of humans and to the qualities denoting human relationship with nature (Plumwood 20-21).

As for Plath's "Polly's Tree," it is interesting to note the coupling of roosting and the milkweed seed, a conflation of significations that assigns the weed, a devalued form of nature, the same status as the bird, a conventional symbol of the imagination and transcendence. In this respect, Wallace Stevens's giant-tree in "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle" serves as a useful comparative context (Stevens 16-17). The anthropomorphic form of Stevens's tree is visualized as a locus of birds which carry the poetic vision beyond the material world. The link with the visionary is never lost, because the tree is capable of close communication with the transcendent due to the "tip" that "tips the tree" (line 110). Ironically, the same connection to the visionary can be found in the

poems where Plath's persona rises in "Lady Lazarus" (*Collected Poems* 244-247) or "Fever 103°" (*Collected Poems* 231-233), however demonic these pieces may be.

Plath's "Dark Wood, Dark Water" (*Collected Poems* 127) may be regarded as representing the category of texts emphasizing the integrity and self-sustainability of nature, where opposites do not mark oppositions but complimentary alternating states. The poem is concerned with various physical transformations, which symbolize transitions of the mind to a rejuvenated state. In Plath's "Dark Wood, Dark Water," the route to another state leads through an implied communion between "old pewter roots" (line 15) and the mystical deity of nature, which causes a transformation of "dark wood" into "the fir":

This wood burns a dark
Incense. Pale moss drips
In elbow-scarves, beards

From the archaic
Bones of the great trees.
Blue mists move over

A lake thick with fish.
Snails scroll the border
Of the glazed water

With coils of ram's-horn.

(Plath, *Collected Poems* 127)

The woods may be a sanctified, a holy place, indeed a church, similar to the description of the tree in "The Moon and the Yew Tree" (172-173). The scene, however, remains the gloomy wood haunted by ancestral trees, which doze in stiflingly heavy air, where the firs are circled by waterlights. "Old pewter roots" that "twist/Up from the jet-backed/Mirror of water" (lines 15-17) unite two levels, an "out in the open" illuminated by waterlights and a "down there," hidden under the surface of the "glazed water" (lines 12, 9). Both levels are shaped and transformed by the "late year" personified as "she" who "Hammers her rare and/Various metals" (lines 13-14).

The poem may reflect Plath's fascination with the mythology of the White Goddess as described in *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* by Robert Graves (81, 38). According to Judith Kroll, the book introduced to Plath by her husband, Ted Hughes, provided her with insights into the powers of the White Goddess to animate trees and nature. Central in this mythology is the matching of

the depictions of death with the anticipation of rebirth and transformation, combined with meditation on the capacity of the goddess to link to the secrets of origins and inspiration (Kroll 81). In this context, the use of the feminine pronoun⁶ may illustrate a departure from the representation of nature in terms of oppositional dualism, a predisposition that Maureen Devine calls “an age-old tendency to portray nature in images that are feminine, [with] the metaphors revers[ing] back onto nature, casting not only woman as attuned to nature, but nature as helpless, as exploitable, and as victimized as traditional woman” (Devine 64).

In Plath’s poem, the burning wood pointing to the celestial spheres and the roots reflected in water extending into the terrestrial realms reveal an organic movement of all elements along vertical and horizontal planes that ensures the transformative continuity of natural objects. As such, it provides a locus for self-generation: “Snails scroll the border/Of the glazed water” (lines 8-9) and through metaphorical transmutations merge into “coils of ram’s horn” (line 10), which may imply waves. On the other hand, the ram’s horn may signify a shophar, the horn of a ram blown at Passover or during the celebration of the Jewish New Year.⁷ Since these occasions mark new beginnings, the metaphoric links with the dark water of “A lake thick with fish” (line 7) suggest a desire to enhance connections with the elemental life forces signified by the archetypal symbols of immortality—water and fish. However, rejuvenation of the life-enhancing spirit through dissolution of darkness may be this poem’s subtext, though it is already impressive simply as a lyrical meditation in the Romantic and even the Metaphysical poetic traditions.

We can read the poem as a mythological parable of transition from an unconscious state, represented by the roots, to the resurrected body (fir tree) enlivened by impinging particles of gold-light. However, the darker aspects of the “jet-backed/Mirror of water” (lines 16-17) may rise to drown the state of spiritual transformation. This threat may be felt in the concentration of the light in quoits, an object used in games. Even though the quoits may indicate expansion of the self or may stand for a projection of the rings of the tree, there is a suggestion that the waterlights/quoits may not always hit the bole of the fir, and the green tree may again become part of its dark ancestral stock. And even if all the quoits find their mark, they must descend to the “Old pewter roots” (line 15) and moldering bones as the sands in the hourglass run out, the light dies, and the game ends.

Conclusion

This outlining of the development of the theme of the root/tree dialectics in Sylvia Plath’s suggests that Plath’s attempt to exercise her creative force, or what Ted Hughes calls revealing “the birth circumstances of [the] poetic gift,” is not a failing but a determined struggle with the celebrated “discursive autobiographies,” in Hughes’s phrase, of the “strong poets,” such as a Wordsworth or a Pasternak. In Plath’s tree-poems, her integrative (linguistic) act may to some give the impression of producing a reduced vision of the imaginative model represented by Wordsworth or Pasternak—as if the upper branches striving toward transcendent heights were cut off; yet, her (supposedly deficient) foliage and her preoccupation with roots indicate that though for Plath, there is only one direction—down—every poem is actually a triumph against dissolution. The re-vision of her texts in the light of ecofeminist tenets offers a locus for challenging the standard nature/female versus culture/man hierarchy. Such a revision also highlights how Plath’s verse carries potentialities for re-imagining alternative visions to the domination of nature through feminization and the subjection of woman through naturalization. What is more, looking back at the tree may help recover it from the status of the “dismissible,” i.e. from a misconception

that, as pointed out by Glen A. Love, frequently informs anthropocentric discourse (Love 24).

Endnotes

- ¹ For the impact of the father's death on the development of Plath's personality and her creative career in relationship to the tree as an embodiment of the White Goddess as described by Robert Graves, see Judith Kroll (1976).
- ² In the study on "The Philosophical Tree," Jung describes the symbol of the tree in terms of psychological development and views the tree within the context of mythological and alchemical parallels. The psychological processes depicted include the union of opposites through the integration of the unconscious often symbolized by roots (Jung, *CW* 13, 272-273).
- ³ For a discussion of the psychological meaning of the Grimm tale, see Jung (*ibid.* 193-195).
- ⁴ For a presentation of Pasternak's ideas, see Gibbons (23).
- ⁵ I am using the word "fountain" in the same sense as the Romantic poets, who describe the creative process as a spontaneous mental reflection of the participation in the mysteries of nature through the senses. See Aidan Day (55).
- ⁶ Cf. Keats, who personifies autumn as masculine in "To Autumn." According to Anthony Libby, Plath tends to substitute for the idea of the transcendent God the Romantic idea that the Deity dwells in all forms of nature; moreover, "the deity involved in her myth is seldom clearly described by Plath" (Libby 132).
- ⁷ I am indebted to my former colleague, David Jenkins, for helping me to trace this link.

References

- ABRAMS, M.H. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. New York: Oxford UP, 1958.
- BARRY, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002.
- BRITZOLAKIS, Christina. "Ariel and Other Poems." Ed. Jo Gill. *The Cambridge Companion to Sylvia Plath*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006. 107-123.
- BURKE, Kenneth. 1950. "The Vegetal Radicalism of Theodore Roethke." *Sewanee Review* 58 (1950): 68-108.
- DAVIDSON, Cathy N., and E. M. Broner, eds. *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature*. New York: Ungar, 1980.
- DAY, Aidan. *Romanticism*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- DEVINE, Maureen. *Woman and Nature: Literary Reconceptualizations*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow P, 1992.
- GERSDORF, Catrin and Sylvia Mayer. "Introduction." Ed. Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer. *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies: Transatlantic Conversations on Ecocriticism*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006. 9-21.
- GIBBONS, Reginald. *The Poet's Work: 29 Poets on the Origins and Practice of Their Art*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989.
- GRAVES, Robert. *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*. London: Faber and Faber, 1961.
- HUGHES, Ted. "Sylvia Plath and Her Journals." Ed. Paul Alexander. *Ariel Ascending: Writings about Sylvia Plath*. New York: Harper, 1985. 109-119.
- KHEEL, Marti. "From Heroic to Holistic Ethics: The Ecofeminist Challenge." Ed. Greta Gaard. *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993. 243-271.

- KROLL, Judith. *Chapters in a Mythology: The Poetry of Sylvia Plath*. New York: Harper, 1976.
- JUNG, C.G. *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*. Vol. 13. Ed. Sir Herbert Read, Jung, Carl Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler. Trans. R.F.C. Hull. London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1953-1978.
- LIBBY, Anthony. *Mythologies of Nothing: Mystical Death in American Poetry: 1940-70*. Urbana, Ill.: U of Illinois P, 1984.
- LINDBERG-SEYERSTED, Britta. *Sylvia Plath: Studies in Her Poetry and Her Personality*. Oslo: Novus Press, 2002.
- LOVE, Glen A. *Practical Ecocriticism: Literature, Biology and the Environment*. Charlottesville: Virginia UP, 2003.
- MARSACK, Robyn. *Sylvia Plath*. Buckingham: Open UP, 1992.
- MAYER, Sylvia. "Literary Studies, Ecofeminism and Environmentalist Knowledge Production in the Humanities." Ed. Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer. *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies: Transatlantic Conversations on Ecocriticism*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006. 111-128.
- PESA, Pamela Di. "The Imperious Muse: Some Observations on Women, Nature, and the Poetic Tradition." Ed. Cheryl L. Brown and Karen Olson. *Feminist Criticism: Essays on Theory, Poetry and Prose*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1978. 59-68.
- PLATH, Sylvia. *Collected Poems*. Edited with an introduction by Ted Hughes. London: Faber and Faber, 1980.
- . *Letters Home: Correspondence 1950-1963*. Selected and edited with commentary by Aurelia Schober Plath. London: Faber and Faber, 1975.
- PLUMWOOD, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. London, Routledge, 1993.
- ROSE, Jacqueline. *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*. London: Virago, 1991.
- STEVENS, Wallace. *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*. New York: Vintage, 1957.
- STEVENSON, Anne. *Bitter Fame: A Life of Sylvia Plath*. London: Penguin, 1989.
- WARREN, Karen J. "Taking Empirical Data Seriously: An Ecofeminist Philosophical Perspective." Ed. Karen Warren. With editorial assistance from Nisvan Erkal. *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997. 3-20.
- . "Introduction to Ecofeminism." Ed. Michael E. Zimmerman, J. Baird Callicott, George Sessions, Karen J. Warren, and John Clark. *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1993. 20 June 2006 <<http://www.lilith-ezine.com/articles/environmental/Introduction-to-Ecofeminism.html>>
- WEBB, Timothy, ed. *W.B. Yeats: Selected Poetry*. London: Penguin, 1991.
- YORKE, Liz. *Impertinent Voices: Subversive Strategies in Contemporary Women's Poetry*. London: Routledge, 1991.