

## NARRATIVE POETRY, TRAUMA, AND MYTH

*It is important to note that as the art and science of psychoanalysis declined as a glamorous and lucrative over the past forty years so the high art of poetry has become a minor art form in the public's eye. Ironically as this took place the importance of narrative, the life narrative in the psychoanalytic dialogue as most eloquently expressed by Roy Schaefer and Joyce McDougall in the 1970's and the return to narrative, for me the dramatic narrative, became an important genre again – one practiced by a few poets like Robert Frost and T.S. Eliot but largely held in contempt by my generation. In this paper I'm going to stress the importance of narrative not with applied psychoanalysis but in an interdisciplinary way as both a poet (ten books, a Guggenheim and a practicing and training psychoanalyst (for forty years). I'm going to approach how narrative works specifically in poetry in the hope that fellow analysts will be able to apply it to what they hear in their work with individuals (who have survived childhood and adult trauma), couples and groups. Further I have found that in my psychoanalytic institute The National Psychological Institute For Psychoanalysis several people write poetry themselves and some even use it to get to the emotions of disassociated patients. I'm going to begin by giving an historical overview of how a battle had to be fought in poetry for the return of the narrative and dramatic poem. I'm going to use my own dramatic poems fueled by trauma and harking back to fairytales as a subtext. I'm going to conclude with a major poem of Sylvia Plath's which I wrote about in an applied psychoanalytic way that the Psychoanalytic Review, our Institute's journal published in 2016:*

Since the 1970's the long linear narrative or dramatic poem has been held in disrepute even in literary circle, hardly written, taught. and largely unpublishable. This lost genre is symptomatic, as I've mentioned, of the loss of poetry as a major art form. Contemporary poetry in all its genres has barely survived, ironically so, in the faux anti-academic world of English departments where plot usually is held in contempt specifically for being structured, Aristotelian. In an era when identity politics has replaced genuine literary standards and criticism, plot is considered to be politically incorrect in what often is presented as a socially chaotic world. Further, meter and rhyme -- crucial for sustaining the dramatic drive in most narrative poems are considered to be even more "reactionary" than plot itself.

Except for what I'll later describe as the efforts and work of the Expansive Poetry/ New Formalism movement, what had dominated poetry for more than twenty years, the short free verse Confessional poem whose narrator is a severely disturbed "I" still remains central to American poetry. The poems are *limited imitations* of Sylvia Plath's "formal lyrics" and brief narratives which strove for and sometimes brilliantly achieved mythic meaning. What also has prevailed are slight, prosaic domestic lyrics, the equivalent of today's tweets -- tone deaf *imitations* of Dr. William Carlos Williams' work which drew us into the larger world of others that he experienced daily as a pediatrician.

Apart from political and social justifications for the abandonment of the linear narrative, others outside this aforementioned literary movement argue that narrative poetry is doomed for decades because technology has weakened attention spans -- first commercial breaks in television, now from the incessantly distracting information technologies.

Yet of course this contention can't hold up because novels remain widely read.

Put simply since the 1970's poets don't want to work with narrative and the techniques of meter and rhyme not only because it still is unfashionable but because they aren't taught to or want to learn themselves by modeling their work on masters of narrative on how to use it. This shunning of craft comes astonishingly clear to me when published and minor politically influential poets still confess to me in private or almost boastfully in print that they don't use meter and rhyme because they didn't know how to.

Back in the eighties and nineties, I found myself first astonished, amused and despairing but along with a handful of literary friends acquaintances (Frederick Turner, Dana Gioia, Charles Martin) who were writing short and long narratives, I became determined in my own way to help publically confront this narrowing of poetry. In the mid 1980's I begin compiling an anthology of *Expansive Poetry: The New Narrative And The New Formalism* consisting of most effective essays written to counter these the anti-narrative and anti-form trends. In 1989 Robert McDowell's new and appropriately named Story Line Press published it. Now, there was nothing new about narrative and form but for our times and in our country, culturally overly-involved with novelty in I reluctantly agreed with Robert to use the snappier "new" instead of "contemporary."

By the time the anthology came out there began an outcry against our efforts in criticism let alone the kind of poetry we were writing. There were several articles and then a whole issue of the *Ohio Review* (1990) devoted to what we were “up to.”

For instance in that issue the poet Reg Saner said this:

“If poetry is to reflect where we are, it isn’t likely to abandon the main feature of 20<sup>th</sup> century art, fragmentation. We may call refer to ‘aleatory’ sequence or to ‘suppression of narrative links,’ but we remain tied to their devices {because our sense that life is awash with random events. We admit ‘chance’ is a word describing aspects of our ignorance, but also admit chance into our designs, knowing that any set of objects tends to become a system.

In another essay addressing our work the politically influential editor and poet Bim Ramke admitted this:

”When I hear talk of exotic, subtle intellectual use of forms, I want to be part of it, but when I try to do it, I fail. Of course I fear that my failure may simply result from my laziness, lack of talent, lack of a trained ear. Stephen Spender suggests that if one has not been raised from childhood ‘speaking sonnets’ then the sonnets one writes will have the same order of awkwardness as the foreign language one learns too late. My sonnets are awkward.

Not only my sonnet, I once wrote a two-hundred or so line poem in smooth ballad stanzas with all the proper rhymes. It sat around for a while sounding silly, so I got rid of the rhymes and roughed up the meter, and sold it. It paid one month’s rent so I felt less guilty

Then as per usual Rimke went on to a directly attack us on the always reliable and still reliable identity politics, of narrative and form not being politically correct, though I’m sure he knew nothing about our actual politics:

“Is it possible that the return if there is one, to received forms is because the elite wants its badge shined? I noticed a number of comments during the inauguration of Ronald Regan about ‘class restored to the White House.’ ‘Class, of course is to be translated ‘money.’ ... And just maybe the call for sonnets, villanelles, among contemporary poets is a way of setting up class lines too.”

The call he was addressing was not only to oppose what we said in our criticism in the anthology but in what we were doing in our own narrative and lyric poems in form. Among those being attacked without naming them were Mark Jarman, Rita Dove, Emily Grosholz, Molly Peacock, Timothy Steele and Frederick Turner (our most outspoken critic). What he didn't know was that. Expansive Poetry did not begin with that anthology published in 1989 but ten years early when unable to find publishing outlets for work such as ours, Frederick Turner and Ronald Sharpe took on the editorial task of re-starting *The Kenyon Review* devoted to narrative and form which quickly developed a subscription of 20,000 readers. Luckily, at the same time, Raymond J. Smith and Joyce Carol Oates' *Ontario Review*, Theodore and Renee Weiss's *Quarterly Review of Literature* and Frederick Morgan and Paula Deitz's *Hudson Review* supported in their own way our magazine base by publishing not only poems and essays of ours but our dramatic and narrative poems too.

It is both accurate and still amusing to read the back cover of Expansive Poetry where McDowell polemically declared:

**“THIS BOOK IS ABOUT POETRY YOU CAN READ! THE DIRECTION OF LITERARY HISTORY IN THIS COUNTRY, RIGHT NOW! EXPANSIVE POETRY** abounds in characters, incidents, shared experiences, rhythms that ache to be felt. **EXPANSIVE POETRY** offers a widening sense of communal experience linked to a past and a literature pre-dating the seventies' and eighties' retreat to 'selfhood' {meaning a pathologically narcissistic self} in poetry.”

Throughout the '90's a "Battle of the Books" (as Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope in his *Essay On Criticism* in couplets mockingly called it in their time) heated up as much as poetry could develop a heat. As a measure of how we succeeded – temporarily, historically, Story Line published such anthologies as *Rebel) Angels: 25 Poets of the New Formalism*, ed. by Mark Jarman and David Mason, *After The New Formalism*, ed. by Annie Finch, and the first critical book on the movement *Expansive Poetry* written by Kevin Waltzer which would win the American Library Association's *Choice* award as the best critical book of the year.

The movement became a mite popular here and international, especially in Britain and Australia. *Poetry Australia* devoted an issue to it. John Millet its editor and read sections of my book-length poem in couplets *Manhattan Carnival* on the radio -- as later the psychoanalyst Frank Lachmann told me he had heard Garrison Keilor read its opening on his show. Our poems and essays began being translated in different languages and interestingly enough a New Formalism movement began in Vietnam, using what we had done as a model. Winning (for a while) pleased us but as usual with artists each of us needed get back what were emotionally best at – writing our own narratives and lyrics. For me it mainly was writing narrative poetry four forms. I am going to use my own work to illustrate these forms at work and afterwards discuss what the origins of the techniques of rhyme and meter used to develop them in using in part my own traumas in the subtexts as best as I can reconstruct them.

The four forms, from my point of view, are: the short narrative or dramatic poem focusing on one or more characters' external and internal lives – the equivalent being the single patient's hopefully temporary life narrative, book length episodic narrative – as it develops and changes over the course of treatment, the linear narrative with a plot made of interlocking dramatic monologues – which we see in family therapy -- and the dramatic sequence either mixed with related lyrics or with repeated characters with strong mythic or fairytale underpinnings.

So, in the first instance, in my first book *Survivors* I had created short narratives thematically related by the theme of survival that connected internal and external worlds of unrelated characters. These poems were created as fictions but the fires stoking every narrative and drama of course must be from one's personal experience, as in Method Acting the actor finds in him or herself the emotional experiences that touch on those of the character they are portraying. Many of the poems of *Survivors* were written after I had survived a humiliating flop in theater (a minor trauma that drove the 26-year-old me to seek out therapy) and the rewarding but sometimes treacherous experience of working as PR Director and then Chairman of American Committee to Keep Biafra Alive during the Nigerian Civil War.

For instance, one day in the brutal winter of 1968 we knew the secessionist state Biafra wouldn't survive as a country after in a genocidal siege and many deaths from *kwasikor*. This depressed me but a sudden Spring-like day momentarily lifted my spirits. My wife and I were walking in Central Park with scenes full of life. I wrote this narrative on flyers asking for help we customarily carried:

## GRANDFATHER" IN WINTER

The overcoats are gone from Central Park  
 -- In the sudden Spring.  
 A clump of leaves, that lay in a white crypt  
 Of roots for months, loosens, looking for life.  
 Bare feet of hippies on the sunny walks.  
 Rock-heaps of pigeons bursting like corn, food  
 From brown bags, from white hands, from black hands,  
 Black and white kids kissing in the high rocks,  
 In the Robin laps, in the hands of God  
 Above. Below, an old man, in a rough coat,  
 Wearing my grandfather's frown, lifts his face  
 Up to the sun and smiles smacking his lips.  
 His sky-blue Buchenwald tattoo has healed.  
 Below him, in the skating rink, a small  
 Girl, Jewish, repeats the rings of the park:  
 The ring of her father skiing around her,  
 The guard around him, the border of the rink  
 Around him, the rings of the pigeon-walks,  
 The rings of clouds, of jets, of the young  
 Sun around it. Me on the parapet,  
 The blood of the false Spring ringing my heart.  
 My wife beside me aims her camera at  
 The girl. The girl falls. The rope jerks. Nine  
 Iraqi Jews are falling through the air,  
 The Arab horde around them cheers. *Shema.*  
 The feet clump like leaves. The eyes turn up: white  
 Rocks. Israel in winter prepares again  
 For war. Around the gas-house are the guards,  
 Around the guards, pogroms. Deserts of dead,  
 Miles wide and miles thick. The rings around  
 Her borders are of time. Grandfather knows.  
 His dead eyes scrutinize my eyes. He knows  
 Tomorrow snow will fall like lead, the news  
 Will be obituaries, Kaddish will  
 Be sung. It is the eve of war again.  
*Shema.*

Some time afterwards pieces of history emerged in my-analysis which helped me understand why I had been working for a year trying to save starving children. All three had to do with the mother and child relationship.

One piece came from a silent subplot of my life narrative. When I was an infant I had repeated ear infections in pre-penicillin days and had unendurable pain that my mother's touch and soothing voice couldn't comfort me. Unable to speak through my pain while I waited for the pediatrician to come and lance my infections, I distracted myself on my bed with intricate patterns of tapping my fingers five times. First my thumb, then my pinky, followed by my middle finger, then index finger and ending with the ring finger. Then I would reverse the pattern. Afterwards, for instance it was a middle finger, pinky, thumb, index finger, ring finger. And so on until the doctor arrived I am sure this was the first basis for my use of iambic pentameter, the five beat line.

Further, later, I'm those same patterns seemed to be a distraction from the primal scene. In an autobiographical essay I was asked to write to the *Contemporary Authors Autobiographical Series* ( ) I tongue –in-cheek described how I distracted myself from this trauma by a finger-tapping ritual much like the iambic beat on which “Grandfather In Winter”. Also I illustrated an origin of my using the narrative. I wrote that

“I remember my early years by the different bedroom I slept in. First my parents’ bedroom where I stayed too long waiting for a vacancy. Later I would sleep in my grandfather’s room where he kept me up late telling stories of his life on the farm he lived on in Poland and making animal noises my mother forbade because they kept me up.

Furthermore I discovered a deeper motive for trying to save children whose lives were threatened, again having to do with the mother-child relationship. I was acting out of a rescue fantasy – in this case symbolically trying “rescue” my mother from the brutality of her witnessing two pogroms (where people were publically slaughtered and raped) in her town in The Pale of Settlement. Through the literal touch of pen to paper I was symbolically comforting her as she was unable to comfort me when I was in need of rescue as an infant. In the subtext I am sure that the Holocaust survivor (who wasn’t my actual grandfather) was representative of the rest of her family who perished in The Holocaust.

Several times I have written in psychoanalytic essays about the importance of connecting personal and public trauma.

As for the form I called the dramatic sequence and the lyrics related to it, after 9/11 hit. I found myself writing an essay ( ) on how I had to move from the lyrics in the first section of what became my book *Fallout* to the linear narrative *Dark Carnival* having with an underlying fairytale to create some emotional distance to help heal me and hopefully my readers.

Here is an introductory note to *Dark Carnival*

In *Manhattan Carnival* (the prequel to *Dark Carnival*) Mark Stern wakes up depressed, to an empty marriage bed after having a one-night stand. He and his wife Marlene have split up because (among many reasons) he wanted to have a child and she hasn't. *Manhattan Carnival* set in the seventies is Mark's journey through a carnival-like Manhattan to find Marlene. He does, and the book-length narrative ends with Mark and Marlene having sex and conceiving a child.

In *Dark Carnival*, it's thirty years later. Their child Jill has lost her husband Jack to the World Trade disaster. It begins with Mark waking up again to an empty bed. This time Mark takes a journey through a changed New York to try to find not only Marlene but also his widowed daughter.

Jack and Jill: For me, not only the poetic narrative, but all works of art have to have an underlying myth or fairytale, and in America particularly, fairytales seem more important. In other narratives of mine which involve the loss of ideals and idealizations I often allude to or directly invoke *The Wizard of Oz* or *Camelot*, specifically Jack Kennedy's. Thus Jack who died like my generation's beloved Jack Kennedy died ending an America we idealized particularly as experienced by the returned Peace Corps volunteers who went to Nigeria and formed the American Committee to Keep Biafra Alive.

In terms of the structure besides plot in the long dramatic narrative, parallels and contrasts abound. So Mark tries to locate his wife and daughter in the same locales as in *Manhattan Carnival*. Here are the parallel and contrasting passages that begin both episodic narrative poems.

## from MANHATTAN CARNIVAL

“Get up, Marlene?” I smell the April rain  
 And squint half-dreaming at the windowpane  
 Where inter light intensifies to Spring.  
 I pull the plug so our alarm won’t ring,  
 Then prop myself up on our double bed  
 And dip to kiss the imprint of your head  
 And rub your pillow for Aladdin’s lamp.  
 Oh, I’m a sheltered child away in camp!  
 Get up, she’s gone. “Marriage is for the birds.”  
 But who expresses feelings in *those* words?  
 Stockings, torn underpants litter the floor.  
 And who’s that leering from our bedroom door?

## from DARK CARNIVAL

“Get up, Mark Stern, it’s summer spring, it’s fall  
 And winter’s coming fast; the caterwaul-  
 In Geese, heading for Miami Beach  
 Fly in a V, perfectly out of reach,  
 As Jack, twirling bacon on a fork,  
 Called on his cell phone – then flew from New York  
 Over New Jersey, south to God knows where,  
 A soul in freedom, once a millionaire  
 Broker with Morgan Stanley, handsome Jack,  
 Sensitive Jack. Mourning won’t bring him back.”

After finishing *Manhattan Carnival*, I saw it on stage for two nights in town at The  
 Medicine Show, a theater partly devoted to verse plays, a rarity in New York. On the spot I  
 decided to experiment with the linear plot with the interlocking monologues I mentioned -- in  
 this case two or three page interlocking dramatic monologues to form the comedy *The  
 Psychiatrist At The Cocktail Party* written for the stage as we’ll see on the page.

At the time I had begun psychoanalytic training and in one class my psychoanalyst teacher absurdly said that in the best analysis the therapist said nothing. The whole poem/verse play is a satire on Radical Chic (the upscale forerunner of Political Correctness) where celebrities like Leonard Bernstein held fund-raisers in which the wealthy entitled raised funds for the down-and-out radical entitled. My point of view character in this plot was my teacher's ideal, a psychiatrist who revealed nothing about himself in speech while the guests were revealing their giddy or sycophantic or angry feelings to him about the goings-on of a party for a Marxist Revolutionary from Quistador, an imaginary Latin American country. I used various verse forms for each character as one must have different speech patterns for characters speaking prose in a play. Some of the verse forms were standard, some invented depending on the emotions of each character. Here are some alternate rhymes of "The Headhunter," a financially struggling working and radical "Joe" brought to the party by a friend:

from THE PSYCHIATRIST AT THE COCKTAIL PARTY

JOE – The Headhunter

... "Twenty years ago I marched for Civil Rights,  
 Against The War – who cares about the rent!  
 We masochistically submit and pay  
 The past, the future to the government.  
 Forget about the present, any big delights  
 In your one room, driving your Chevrolet,  
 Your insides eaten up by parasites.  
 You, not your money, is what winds up spent.

Everyone is listening with smiles. All right,  
 Then I'll speak up:

It's twenty years ago,

Think of the underprivileged -- it's you  
 And me – the average Jane, the average Joe,  
 Each friend of Quistador who's here tonight --  
 Black and white, Catholic, Protestant, Jew,  
*We're* suffering. What are we going to do –  
 Act young and sentimental, underwrite  
 Cocaine fields for this sly Mustachio,

Or take our own life with, er *in* our hands?  
 A slip, the Doctor smiles. Of course I'm crazy –  
 From working 9 to 9 for Uncle Sam  
 Who in the '60's called us "hippies," "lazy."  
 I'm glad to see that someone understands.

Your nodding, Sir, is welcome. Thank you, Mam.  
 Maybe I'm loaded. I don't give a damn.  
 Why don't we learn to make our own demands  
 Like Senor Wences here. You're looking hazy –

When we were kids, he was a t.v. puppeteer  
 Who made a face with lipstick on his hand.  
 He entertains us now with politics,  
 Except we liberals fail to understand  
 The underpinnings of our Help is Fear –

Of Uncle Sammy's cutting off our dicks.  
 So we're distracted by the Senor's shticks,  
 Before they altogether disappear,  
 We'll vicariously join his rebel band."

Perhaps because as a poet I'm highly-attuned to verbal style in doing treatment, particularly the use of a key metaphor describing the Self delivered as a cliché in the first session and first dream – and for its re-appearance in subsequent sessions and dreams with more and more layers making the character of the patient rounder and rounder/. It does so, as I came to understand, because the patient's primary processes of displacement and condensation in making metaphors in the psychoanalytic dialogue as well as in dreams becomes more and more developed. I came to understand this basically through the work

Of the Israeli psychoanalyst Pinchas Noy who wrote extensively on psychoanalysis and art. In the Use Of Primary Process ? ( ) he pointed out that primary processes aren't fixed but become more and more sophisticated with psychoanalysis and form a developmental line of its own. I came to see this in the development from cliché delivered in the first session to true metaphor not only in the manifest content of dreams as a patient improves – but also the increasing sophistication of the narrative as Ephron and Carrington proved ( )

I came to see this particularly in working with traumatic origins in the life narratives of two traumatized patients I called “The Bag Lady And Her Bag Of Jewels” and “The Man In The BMW” (2006, 2008) They taught me that a key metaphor delivered as a cliché in the first session and the first dream not only presages the narrative or dramatic arc of treatment but also encode the pathological side of the psyche.

A poetic example of a key figure metaphorically knitting together a dramatic sequence of poems is the archetype “Witch” in the fairytale sequence in my latest book *Dark Energy*. She sometimes represents the bad mother or stepmother or a Nazi or an Islamist Fascist. Two poems of a brief section about Freud's Vienna sets the Witch/Nazi metaphor up:

And so, the first two stanzas of LAUIS:

Freud made his father weak – the Jew who doffed  
His hate to *goys* who shoved him in the street.  
But all Jews had to doff their hats while shoved.  
Oedipus was a boy who scoffed,

Whose mother sat at analytic meetings.  
He dreamed he fucked her as he smoked cigars;  
He dreamed they both were movie stars;  
Sigmund, the Witch, Hansel and the Mama.

The beginning of THE WITCH:

In Freud's Vienna no one could believe  
 The children they molested there could feel,  
 Although from fairytales they did expect  
 The Witch to heat up children for a meal.

Finally she becomes most rounded as The Nazi Witch in HANSEL AND GRETEL

From HANSEL&GRETEL

They ate so fast, they quickly fell asleep,  
 A crescent moon gave way to Aryan sun.  
 She lifted Hansel, lay him in a cage  
 And while he rubbed his head in disbelief,  
 She ordered Gretel, "Fatten him on meat,  
 And rice and cheese, *sacher torts*, and pie.  
 This mixture will make all of him taste nice:  
 His hands, his feet, his eyeballs, and his ears.  
 I'll sing for you and put to sleep your fears."  
 Her lullaby entranced Gretel to feed  
 Hansel who ate till his small stomach swelled

But he secreted a long-chicken bone  
 Because he knew all witches are compelled  
 To re-enact their evil ways each day.  
 He knew that in his stepmom's witch's house.  
 So when she'd pinch to see if he was plump,  
 He's stick the bone out like a soldier's stump.

Fed up at last, the witch lit the waiting oven  
 And ordered Gretel to creep in and test  
 To see if it was getting Auschwitz-hot.  
 Gretel delayed. "Fatwa!" the witch exclaimed  
 And stuck her head in, stupid in her vice.  
 Gretel shoved her, bolted the oven door:  
 "Now howl, Mother. *We* will taste what's nice."  
 Strong as a Sabra, she unblocked the cage  
 And led her brother out, uneaten, free.  
 They scooped up all the witches' cakes  
 And brought them home. Poppa was overjoyed.  
 The witch he married, Tyranny, was dad.  
 They danced and sang and on the future fed.

I'd like to close with a few words more words about style, in psychoanalysis and poetry, here with rhyme and assonance which also comes up frequently in the communication of dreams.

This I first learned in an indirect way in working with a patient who with who taught me the similarity between using rhyme to form a narrative in poetry and a life narrative in psychoanalysis.

He couldn't remember his dreams but often would put himself to sleep by scrawling rhymes that came to him on a yellow pad. He brought the rhymes into session which led him not only to the basic emotions he was trying to express but also to associations and deeper latent thoughts. That made me wonder if rhyme wasn't another aspect of dream work besides condensation, displacement, dramatization, symbolization, and secondary process. When teaching I came across this little passage this little quoted passage from Freud's *On Dreams*:

“The most convenient way of bringing together two unconscious dream thoughts is to alter the verbal form of one of them and this brings it halfway to meet the other which may be similarly clothed in a new form of words. A parallel process is involved in hammering out a rhyme, where a similar sound has to be sought in the same way as a common element in our present case.”

Also I found this so in the work of the “unknown” psychoanalyst and linguist, Theodore Thass Thienemann in a basically unknown but brilliant two volume work *The Interpretation Of Language* (1968). Here he posited etymology as another royal road to the unconscious. Of rhyme he said: “Where there is an association of sounds, there will also be an association of meanings ... If one inspects one or another treatise on rhyme, one will find again and again an “unwitting continuation of the psychological interpretation through philological data ... Sound associations elicit some pleasure from the store of narcissistic echolalia as experienced by the small child. It springs up from the earliest unconscious layers of language. It is genuine with the forgotten language of unconscious fantasies. The analytic interpretation tries to translate the language of unconscious fantasies into the common spoken language. The rhyme is one of the characteristic of this almost forgotten language.”

Now I'd like to illustrate from Sylvia Plath's use of assonance in here lyric and dramatic poem about a mythic tragic heroine in “Edge” a bit more about style on close inspection we can see how assonance can greatly contribute to the structuring of a narrative.

In “A Psychoanalytic Study Of Sylvia Plath” (2016) I tried to understand her book-length *Ariel* in terms of her schizoid regression unto suicide where she turned herself into a tragic and mythic heroine. In exploring “Edge” I focused on her use of assonance, vowel sounds like baby sounds which seems based on her relationship with a symbiotic mother. In the Introduction to Plath's *Letters Home* Aurelia Plath said, “Between me and Sivvy was a psychic osmosis so that you couldn't tell where she began and I left off.”

This poem applies to Plath's "Kleinian" problems as well as her own difficulties being a mother. *Ariel* was a long manic suicide note – after writing as is popularly known she laid out two pieces of buttered bread for her two children (one who would become a poet, the other a suicide) and put her head in the oven. So the two children appears here, here real ones, and the split self, good and bad:

EDGE

The woman is perfected.  
 Her dead  
 Body wears the smile of accomplishment,  
 The illusion of a Greek necessity

Flows in the scrolls her toga,  
 Her bare

Feet seem to be saying:  
 We have come so far, it is over.

Each dead child coiled, a white serpent,  
 One at each little

Pitcher of milk, now empty.  
 She has folded

Them back into her body as petals  
 Of a rose close when the garden

Stiffens and odours bleed  
 From the sweet, deep throats of the night flower.

The moon has nothing to be sad about,  
 Staring from her hood of bone.

She is used to this sort of thing,  
 Her blacks crackle and drag.

So; this choice of sound in the poem is a perfect shadow to her sense, a verbal music creating the quietness of a noble death. Except for the last line, there are no clusters of harsh consonants and only two (significant) moments of counterpoint, giving the feeling of death throes {a perfect subtext of ultimate infantile merger}.

Thus, there is no poetic resistance to the act: There is no harshness of sound, just as there is no interfering bad object to prevent the killing symbiosis. The short “i’s” made often with frequent dentals and sibilants create a gentle resigned mood, creating through soft consonance reflecting a regression to being a baby is inert in her mother’s arms.

But it’s mainly the long vowels that structure the poem, shape it into three separate sections centered around three different images. In section one (lines 1-8) the long “o’s” of “flows,” “scrolls,” “toga,” and “so” come to rest with her “it is over.” Section two (lines 9-16), with repeated long “e’s” (“I bleed,” “sweet,” and “deep”) takes us by assonance into unspoken sleep.

The last section (lines 17-20 with its moon image, seems to be an almost complete, unresisted swoon toward death.

I hope by now I’ve conveyed how poetic techniques themselves can originate in trauma and bring the author and reader into the realm of forgotten sounds of overly maternal embrace, mouth play, hand play, play in the transitional space and create a meaning that is an adjunct to meaning in higher level content.

The following poem from *Fallout* will adequately express the shifting life narratives of older patients and analysts who like me feel what might be called the traumatic passage of Time and its vicissitudes:

#### RE-READING

When we re-read the fictions of our lives,  
 The genre changes with the characters  
 And what, for instance, seemed a bawdy comedy  
 Becomes, with consequences, tragedy  
 And our best qualities become our worst.  
 So bravery for instance, and tenacity  
 Become impulsiveness, rigidity ...  
 Often re-reading is like reading Braille  
 When we're not blind – we see it makes no sense  
 Anymore than a sleepwalker's dream,  
 Our arms outstretched for meaning, till Time wakes us  
 To what is strangely present, dangerous,  
 And so in many colors, tongues we pray,  
*God have mercy on us, God have mercy on us.*

At the beginning of this paper I noted how the arts of psychoanalysis and poetry have both declined in the public eye over the past forty years. But perhaps the science of psychoanalysis and medicine in general can help support us all once again through narrative. There now in medicine is a new discipline, especially practiced at Columbia University, which is called Narrative Medicine. Here is what Wikipedia has to say about it:

“Narrative medicine is a medical approach that utilizes narratives in clinical practice as a way to promote healing. It aims to address the relational and psychological that occur in tandem with physical illness, with the attempt to treat patients as humans with individual stories, rather than purely based on symptoms. In doing this, narrative medicine aims not only to validate experiences of the patient, but also to encourage creativity and self-reflection in the physician.”