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# Motion and conflicted self metaphors in Sylvia Plath's 'Smith Journal'

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This paper considers how mental states can be conveyed by metaphorical expressions in texts of a personal nature. Figurative language is understood to play an important role in the expression of such complex nuanced phenomena (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Kövecses, 2000; Gibbs, Leggit & Turner, 2002). This study focuses on two main groups of metaphors, linked to mental states, in the Smith Journal of "The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath". 'Mental state' here refers to various aspects of cognitive functioning, but with a focus on mental states of affect — mental states that are intrinsically valenced (Ortony & Turner, 1990). Specifically, this paper focuses on metaphors of MOTION and *SPLIT SELF*.

Both manual intensive analyses and automated corpus methodologies are employed in the investigation: Wmatrix (Rayson, 2009) is used to explore relevant expressions, in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of metaphor groups. Relevant expressions are identified by an in-depth manual analysis of sample journal entries. The MIP procedure (Pragglejaz, 2007) is used for metaphor identification, and interpretations draw on research in psychology. Metaphors of mental states are analyzed in terms of their implications for conveying various aspects of mental states, such as valence and intensity.

## 1. Introduction

The phenomenological experience of highly subjective phenomena such as emotions, perceptions, sensations is difficult to describe using language, but one of the most common ways of doing so is through metaphors.<sup>1</sup> Ortony (1975) suggests that metaphors are necessary for communication because of the distinction between the discreteness of language as a set of symbols and the continuity/fluidity of experience, which is what needs to be conveyed. Metaphors are necessary because they can compactly and efficiently convey a lot of information very vividly — information that is inexpressible literally (Ortony, 1975). As a result,

even in psychology it is recognized that “people often do not convey how they feel through plain emotion words, but rather through metaphor” (Junghaenel, Smyth & Santner, 2008, p. 51). This paper explores some of the ways in which metaphorical expressions can convey the experience of such highly subjective phenomena, collectively termed *mental states*.

“The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath” (Kukil, 2000) is an interesting text for two main reasons. Firstly, the diary as a genre is particularly appropriate for an investigation of the linguistic manifestation of mental states, since it is by nature concerned with the self, and the self’s private thoughts and emotions. Additionally, it is well-documented that Plath suffered from depression for most of her life (e.g. Brian, 2001; Cooper, 2003) and tried to commit suicide at least twice. She writes about these experiences in her diaries. Secondly, Plath’s diary can be seen as an especially rich source of metaphorical language due to her budding talent as a writer and poet. In this sense the diary can also be seen as semi-literary material. For these reasons, it is assumed that her journals are fruitful grounds for the investigation of metaphors of mental states.

The focus of this paper is the first journal published in the collection (henceforth Smith Journal), as it has internal coherence and can be seen as a comprehensive representation of the time it covers. It begins in 1950, at the time Plath leaves home to go to university and ends just before her first suicide attempt in August 1953.

This paper aims to present a small part of the results of a larger investigation into the kinds of metaphorical expressions (representative of the self<sup>2</sup> or mental states) that are present in the Smith Journal. In particular it will focus on metaphors of MOTION (or lack thereof) and metaphors of a ‘*SPLIT SELF*’ (in a broad sense). The way in which metaphorical expressions and their patterning can convey various aspects of mental states will also be touched upon briefly. In the process, some comments will be made on some of the methodological issues encountered during the investigation and the theoretical notions that were useful in circumventing them.

This investigation makes use of both manual intensive analyses and automated corpus approaches. The manual intensive approach aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the way metaphors pattern, combine and interact in a sample of 18 entries in the Smith Journal. Corpus tools (the Wmatrix software of Rayson, 2009) are used to examine in detail the key terms and semantic domains identified in the manual analysis.

After discussing some key terminology, this paper will look at a preliminary extended example from the data to illustrate some of its overall characteristics. It will briefly touch upon some of the theoretical frameworks that can be useful in dealing with texts of this nature. The paper will then examine two groups of

metaphors in more detail: *MOTION* and *SPLIT SELF* metaphors. A final section will summarize and briefly consider the wider implications of these findings.

### 1.1 Key notions

At this stage it is necessary to clarify the approach and some of the key terminology that this paper will adopt. *Mental state*, for instance, is notoriously difficult to define. However, for the purposes of this paper it is to be understood as various aspects of cognitive functioning (e.g. making decisions, thinking, remembering etc.), but the focus, in particular, will be on mental states of affect. Such mental states are said to be intrinsically valenced (Ortony & Turner, 1990), i.e. are on a scale of positive to negative in their experience.

The approach to metaphor that this paper takes is based on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) and accepts (with some reservations; see for example Crawford, 2009) that systematic linguistic patterns are representative of patterns of thought. The linguistic metaphors identified will be grouped into quasi-conceptual metaphors. However, although this is a CMT-style analysis, Steen and Gibbs (1999), argue that cognitive linguists have to be careful with how far they can interpret and generalize from examining linguistic manifestations of conceptual metaphors. This is particularly true for a homogeneous dataset such as the one under consideration here. As such any patterns should be understood as *systematic metaphors* (Cameron, 2008 and Cameron, Low, & Maslen, 2010) rather than conceptual ones. Systematic metaphor is a "set of linguistic metaphors in which connected vehicle words or phrases are used metaphorically about a particular topic" (Cameron et al., 2010, p.127) and can be seen as a discourse alternative to conceptual metaphor. It allows the researcher to remain relatively close to the linguistic examples in the description of patterns (Cameron, 2008). In addition, systematic metaphors in themselves, do not make claims about the cognitive reality of such patterns, but only suggest that there may be a cognitive basis for them.

Metaphor itself will be defined as an instance of language use where the contextual meaning of a word or phrase is different from and to be understood in comparison to the basic meaning of the same word or phrase (Pragglejaz Group, 2007). For example, in the sentence, *For years, Sonia Gandhi has struggled to convince Indians that she is fit to wear the mantle of the political dynasty into which she married, let alone to become premier*, there are several metaphorically used lexical items. Focusing on *mantle*, the Pragglejaz Group (2007) explains that it is metaphorical because in context it "refers to the role that the Ghandi [sic] family has played in the political leadership of India" (2007, p.9). The basic sense, however, would be in reference to a piece of outer clothing usually worn as a symbol

of power. These two meanings are different, but they can be understood in comparison with one another: “We can understand the role of political leadership that someone may take on in a democracy after other members of their family in terms of the garment that is traditionally worn by a monarch” (2007, p. 9).

Metaphor identification, then, is based on MIP (Pragglejaz Group, 2007) and makes the following coding decisions: firstly, one lexical unit of metaphor is to be understood as one word or multi-word unit (e.g. auxiliary + main verb, personal names, phrasal verbs, fixed collocations and idioms). Secondly, the focus is on lexical words rather than function words (and so prepositions, for example, were excluded). Finally, delexicalized/grammaticalized words such as *have*, *do*, *give*, *take*, *make*, *get*, *put*, *like* (Deignan, 2005) are excluded. The basic meanings are identified with the help of the online version of the “Oxford English Dictionary” (<https://www.oed.com>).

Some of these decisions reflect an interest in the more unusual metaphorical expressions. This can be justified in two ways. Firstly, it enables me to do justice to the data at hand, which is rich in complex and novel metaphorical patterns. Secondly, with most highly conventional metaphorical expressions (such as ‘*felt*’ in *I felt sad* or ‘*in*’ in *she is in love*) it is difficult to even imagine a different way of expressing the same mental state. As such, the way things are expressed may be less representative of the mental state and more representative of basic types of conceptualizations in a particular language and culture. There is little or no element of choice (whether conscious or not) in such expressions. On the other hand, in less conventional metaphorical expressions the linguistic options are more open. Therefore the actual choices that have been made (again, whether consciously or not) can be interpreted in a more meaningful way in terms of their expression of various aspects of mental states.

## 1.2 A preliminary example

The nature of the data at hand is best introduced by means of an example. This will be useful in illustrating some of the methodological issues that surfaced during the investigation and in briefly commenting on how metaphorical expressions can convey various aspects of mental states.

Example 1 was written on 3rd November 1952 during Plath’s second year at Smith College. The entry shows frustration, despair and fear, and begins with a phrase that can be seen as a culmination of these feelings: *God, if ever I have come close to wanting to commit suicide, it is now*. There is little indication of the cause of the negative mental state, but Plath alludes to the burden of duties, the uncertainty of the future and the unfulfilled need to talk to somebody. In the extended entry, Plath eventually recognizes that she is privileged and has no rational reason for

feeling the way she does. She decides to at least pretend to be happy. Note: only the metaphorical expressions relating to mental states or the self are underlined.

Example 1

- i I am afraid I am not solid, but hollow. I feel behind my eyes a numb,
  - ii paralyzed cavern, a pit of hell, a mimicking nothingness. I never thought, I
  - iii never wrote, I never suffered. I want to kill myself, to escape from
  - iv responsibility, to crawl back abjectly into the womb. I do not know who I
  - v am, where I am going — and I am the one who has to decide the answers to
  - vi these hideous questions. I long for a noble escape from freedom — I am
  - vii weak, tired, in revolt from the strong constructive humanitarian faith which
  - viii presupposes a healthy, active intellect and will. There is no where [sic] to go.
- (from Entry 154)

In terms of metaphorical expressions, the first aspect to note is textual complexity. Take the notion of emptiness or hollowness for example: firstly, it is textually repeated using the near synonyms *not solid*, *hollow*, *cavern*, *pit*, *nothingness*. Such textual repetition can express the increased intensity of a mental state. Although *nothingness* and *hollow* are debatable examples, the latter at least does suggest a boundary to the space, and so contributes to the potential systematic metaphor of *MENTAL STATE AS AN EMPTY CONTAINER* — note that *CONTAINER* metaphors are conventional (Kövecses, 2000). *Nothingness* on the other hand, may potentially be seen as metaphorical (or at least hyperbolic) since, although it is not realistically possible to 'feel nothingness', one can express a feeling in terms of perceived similarity/comparison with nothingness. In addition, as will be discussed below, its compounding with the preceding metaphorical expressions potentially makes it more metaphorical than it would be considered in other contexts.

Secondly, the *EMPTY CONTAINER* metaphor is conceptually elaborated (Lakoff & Turner, 1989) as something that is located behind the eyes; it is specified as *hell* and conceptually extended (Lakoff & Turner, 1989) as *mimicking*. An alternative way of looking at *mimicking*, is to think of it as an example of compounding (Goatly, 1997): a metaphorical expression (*nothingness*) is referred to metaphorically again by means of personification. More specifically, in this case there is a scenario in which *THE BODY IS AN EMPTY CONTAINER* and that *EMPTY CONTAINER* stands for the mental state. This is then also animated/personified with the ability to interact.

The target concept of suicide is also expressed through a metaphorical scenario where *escape* and *womb* are combined. In this example, *womb*, usually a place of 'origin', becomes a destination — the end of the escape route. A similar reversal (more will be discussed below) can be observed in the portrayal of *freedom* as something to escape from — normally, it is strived for. These target concepts are

additionally combined with the notion of not being able to move/leave (*paralyzed* and *no where [sic] to go*). This implies an inevitability and makes suicide seem like the only option. This is already a rich and complex conceptualization of a suicidal state.

Aside from the *EMPTY CONTAINER* metaphors, linguistic expressions such as *numb* and *paralyzed* can be grouped under the broad semantic field of ‘lacking in sensations’ or ‘not feeling’ in Example 1. In fact, in some ways *womb* can be included in this category as well, since the phrase expresses a desire to be inside the womb, where external stimuli can only reach in a subdued form. These expressions can be seen as giving rise to the *MENTAL STATE AS LACK OF SENSATION* systematic metaphor.

The expression *no where [sic] to go* reflects a combinations of the *CHANGES ARE MOVEMENTS* and *PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS* submappings of the event structure metaphor (Lakoff, 1993; see also Lakoff & Johnson, 1999 and Kövecses, 2010). The first part of the expression relates to the lack of destinations — i.e. the lack of purposes in life in this context. In this sense it could potentially be seen as a manifestation of the more specific *LIFE IS A JOURNEY* metaphor (similarly to *where I am going* in line v). The latter part reflects the notion that destinations are reached through movement. However, in combination and with the negation, the expression works to express precisely a lack of movement, as well as a lack of destination. To some extent, this subverts the event structure metaphor: there is no impediment to the motion as such, but there is also no destination: i.e. no purpose/reason for movement.

This interpretation additionally allows for an alternative categorization to include *paralyzed*. It can be interpreted as expressing a lack of movement, rather than a lack of sensation and be grouped with *no where [sic] to go*. These two expressions could be seen as potential examples of *MENTAL STATE AS LACK OF MOVEMENT* systematic metaphor.

In addition to expressions relating to a lack of movement, Example 1 also includes expressions that can be related to movement away from somewhere. *Escape* (repeated twice) and *crawl back* can be grouped under an *ESCAPE/RETREAT* systematic metaphor (and relate to the *CHANGES ARE MOVEMENTS* submapping of an event structure). Admittedly, escape and retreat are not the same thing, but they are similar in the sense that both involve movement away from something that is unpleasant (e.g., danger or conflict/war).

Aside from textual repetition and conceptual elaboration, Example 1 can also be seen as a textual cluster (Semino, 2008) of metaphors. In lines i–ii for example, linguistic expressions belonging to the source domains of *EMPTINESS*, *RELIGION* (*hell*), *LACK OF SENSATION* (*numb, paralysed*), and *LACK OF MOTION* (*paralyzed*) can all be found in close proximity. The various source domains in the cluster interact

to create a more comprehensive idea of the mental state and also help to express its valence. For example, the source domains of HELL and PARALYSIS carry strong negative connotations that are transferred onto the target domain. *Paralyzed* can additionally be seen as an example of a nested metaphor<sup>3</sup> (Charteris-Black & Mulsolff, 2003). 'Nesting' is the idea that one linguistic token can evoke more than one source domain. In the case of *paralyzed*, at least three source domains are evoked: the 'inability to move', 'a physical illness', and 'lack of sensation'.

It is also worth noting the interaction between the literal (albeit potentially hyperbolic) and metaphorical expressions, as in line iii for example. As pointed out by Gibbs et al. (2002), people do not normally use literal *or* figurative language to describe emotions, but tend to use *both* in order to detail complexity and intensity associated with emotions.

First of all, *I want to kill myself* helps to specify the target domain for the subsequent metaphorical expressions (*escape, crawl back, womb*), which would otherwise have to be generically described as a 'negative mental state'. Instead, in this case it can be described with some certainty as 'suicidality'. It also helps in setting up a scenario that surrounding metaphorical expressions can be attracted into (Cameron & Low, 2004). For example, *womb* is not normally associated with anything negative (or a mental state for that matter), rather, it is seen as nurturing, warm and a place of comfort, as well as a point of origin. However, in the present scenario, it represents the consequence or end point of suicide.

As indicated by some of the references so far, there are a number of theoretical frameworks that are useful in accounting for the various types of complexity embedded in the data. Kövecses's (2000) collection of conceptual metaphors of emotion, as well as Stefanowitsch's (2006) extension of those, can be used as a quasi-comparative norm and an anchor for the systematic metaphors in the text. Additionally, Semino's (2008) notions of textual patterning (in particular, repetition, recurrence, clustering, and (textual) extension) can account for creativity on the textual level, while Lakoff and Turner's (1989) extension, elaboration, and combination, in particular, are useful in describing the creativity on the conceptual level. I would like to echo Semino (2010) in stating that both the conceptual and textual levels are necessary in adequately accounting for metaphorical patterns in any given text.

The complete analysis of metaphorical expressions in Sylvia Plath's Journal produced a number of interesting potential patterns. For example, the manual intensive analysis revealed that negative mental states tend to be expressed with a higher number of, and more complex metaphorical expressions than positive ones. Only 6% of metaphorical references to mental states identified (manually) in the Smith Journal refer to positive states and about two thirds of these are captured by two systematic metaphors: *POSITIVE MENTAL STATE IS WHOLENESS* and *POSITIVE*



*MENTAL STATE IS COMING INTO EXISTENCE*. While the metaphorical references in Example 1 are characteristic of negative mental states, positive mental states tend to be referred to with simpler metaphors e.g. *there was that germ of positive creativeness (COMING INTO EXISTENCE); a sense of capability and self-integrity never before felt (WHOLENESS)*. This in itself is interesting and could suggest that, in the writer's case, negative mental states are experienced more intensely than positive ones (c.f. Ortony & Fainsilber, 1987; and Gibbs et al., 2002).

However, there are two particularly interesting patterns of systematic metaphors that I would like to focus on in more detail here. These are the conceptualizations of negative mental states as either stagnation, or movement in a direction that is undesirable (c.f. the event structure metaphor and its submappings); and conceptualizations of negative mental states as a divisive inner conflict leading to *SPLIT SELF* metaphors.

## 2. Metaphors of motion (or lack thereof)

Various metaphors of *MOTION* (or lack thereof) account for about 21% of the metaphorical expressions of mental states that were identified in the manual intensive analysis. Linguistic manifestations of the various subcategories of these motion metaphors can be seen in Example 2, Example 3 and Example 4. In the examples cited, metaphorical expressions referring to Plath's mental states are underlined. The metaphorical expressions to focus on for each example are also in bold.

Example 2 *LACK OF MOVEMENT* metaphors<sup>4</sup>

- i. to feel his mind soaring, reaching, and mine **caged**... (154)
- ii. don't ignore all the people you could know, **shutting** yourself **up** in a **numb defensive vacuum** (July 6)
- iii. Your room is not your **prison**. You are. (July 6)
- iv. look at the **hell** I am **wallowing** in, nerves **paralyzed**, **action nullified** (154)
- v. you are **paralyzed**, **shocked**, **thrown** into a **nausea**, a **stasis**. (July 6)

Admittedly, some of the expressions in Example 2 (especially *caged*) are difficult to conceive of as *MOTION* metaphors. Perhaps a more accurate description would be to say that all these expressions involve the impossibility to move. However, 'MOTION metaphor' is to be understood as an umbrella term here. The linguistic expressions in bold in Example 2, can be seen as different versions of the *LACK OF MOVEMENT* metaphor that frequently occurs in the Smith Journal. As noted before, these expressions can be related to and understood in terms of the event structure metaphor. Specifically, the *CHANGES ARE MOVEMENTS*, *PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS* and *DIFFICULTIES ARE IMPEDIMENTS TO MOTION* submappings are

of interest here. Destinations are not reached due to the impediments to motions — the impediments in this case, can be understood as blockages (Lakoff, 1993).

Lines i–iii in Example 2 could be grouped under a narrower source domain of *EXTERNAL PHYSICAL RESTRICTION* for example, that limits movement, such as a *cage* or a *prison*. The linguistic examples in these three lines, conceptualize the mental state as being a container that encompasses and limits the self (or the mind as in Example 2i). These could be interpreted as a subversion of Kövecses' (2000) *EMOTION<sup>5</sup> IS SOMETHING IN A CONTAINER (OR STATE IS A LOCATION IN A BOUNDED SPACE* in terms of the event structure metaphor). Instead of the mental state being something inside something else (usually the body), it is the container itself.

Although this type of metaphor is not usually noted in the literature on metaphors of emotions, it has been noted in a slightly different form by McMullen and Conway (2002). They state that depression in particular is often conceptualized as a space that is difficult to get out of. What is also somewhat unusual in i and ii is that the external restriction is conceptualized as self-imposed. Most literature on depression and similar mental states notes that there is often a lack of agency on the part of the sufferer — they do not attribute responsibility to themselves for the way that they are feeling. Yet the linguistic examples here suggest some element of acknowledged responsibility.

Lines iv and v in Example 2 are also examples of the *LACK OF MOVEMENT* source domain. However, in these cases the restriction is an internal physical one. Although, as noted in the discussion of the preliminary example, *paralysis* is an example of a nested metaphor and can carry the meanings of more than one source domain, in this case, the meaning of lack of motion seems to dominate. This probably owes its attraction to the *LACK OF MOVEMENT* scenario to the repetition of similar expressions that do not have multiple meanings (e.g. *action nullified*, *stasis*). In the context of the other *LACK OF MOVEMENT* metaphors, what I find particularly interesting about the idea of a physical inability to move is that it seems even more difficult to overcome than an externally imposed restriction. In this sense, McMullen and Conway's (2002) comment about the unpleasantness and difficulty of overcoming depression as expressed in spatial metaphors seems particularly appropriate.

As a final point it is worth pointing out how the metaphors in almost every line of Example 2 are presented in a contrastive relation. The *soaring* of his mind is in contrast to hers *caged*; *room* can be contrasted with *prison*; *wallowing* with *paralyzed*; and *thrown* with *stasis*. This potentially suggests a sense of conflict, and a more intense mental state. On the other hand, such stylistic features may also be attributed to Plath's literary technique.

Aside from metaphors that suggest a complete lack of movement, there are examples of motion metaphors where although there is movement, it is not of the productive kind.

Example 3 *UNPRODUCTIVE MOVEMENT* metaphors

- i. I am submerged in circling ego (117)
- ii. I am spinning in a temporary vacuum (36)
- iii. look at the hell I am wallowing in (154)

In Example 3 there is some motion in each case, a circular motion in fact. However, in terms the *PROGRESS IS MOTION FORWARD* submapping of the event structure metaphor, these can be interpreted as examples of unproductive movement. The circular motion described in these examples does not progress forwards, but remains in stationary. It can be compared to a ‘vicious cycle’ — fast, circular movement outside the person’s control. It also carries the implication of being difficult to get out of. Both this implication and the lack of agency, map onto the phenomenology of the mental state. Another example of such a metaphor from elsewhere in the Smith Journal would be *whirlpool*.

In addition, in Example 3iii (as in *whirlpool*), there is an entailment of downward motion. In iii this is due to the presence of *hell* which combines with the idea of movement to create a more comprehensive sense of the mental state. McMullen and Conway (2002) among others have pointed out the connection between *DOWNWARD MOVEMENT* metaphors and depression in particular, but circularity has not been discussed extensively.

The final group of metaphors that I would like to include here I will discuss in a slightly different way to the previous ones. Example 4 includes references to actions that involve movement: *escape*, *withdraw* and *retreat* are of particular interest at this point. These expressions themselves entail movement away from something unpleasant — a struggle for example — and they could also be interpreted as subverted examples of *PROGRESS IS MOTION FORWARD*, since the movement is often backwards.

Example 4 Metaphors of *MOVEMENT AWAY*

- i. I want to kill myself, to escape from responsibility, to crawl back abjectly into the womb. I do not know who I am, where I am going — and I am the one who has to decide the answers to these hideous questions. I long for a noble escape from freedom (154)
- ii. begging for sleep, withdrawing into the dark, warm, fetid escape from action (154)
- iii. Perverse desire to retreat into not caring. (July 14)

In addition to the metaphorical expressions, in these examples I have highlighted the ‘origins’ and ‘destinations’ of the relevant movements. *Escape* is away from responsibility, freedom and action, while *withdraw* and *retreat* is into escape and not caring. There seems to be an interesting pattern emerging from these examples, so the relevant key words were explored in the whole of the Smith Journal, using

girlfriend ) and yet to escape the subtle feminine snare and be free of the  
 : is probably trying to escape from . He would then be selfish admitting als  
 ly , as I was trying to escape from something ) I wanted to withdraw from a  
 mprehension of war , of escape , deep rooted your graceful athletic build ,  
 : to procrastinate , to escape from the rigid cage of study routine I have r  
 :ow . Another device of escape . It seems that every year I wince and grovel  
 the dark , warm , fetid escape from action , from responsibility . No good  
 ant to kill myself , to escape from responsibility , to crawl back abjectly  
 is . I long for a noble escape from freedom I am weak , tired , in revolt fr  
 : sure whether it is an escape or a refreshing cure from cooping yourself in  
 s , the leg has been an escape . All the pamperings given to the tuberculos:  
 higher education as an escape from responsibility , but I feel there is so

Figure 1. All occurrences of 'escape' in the Smith Journal

me , speed of time , I retreat into non-thought merely into Epicurean sens  
 get sick , go mad , or retreat , like a child into blubbering on someone e  
 en withdrawing' into a retreat of numbness : it is so much safer not to fe  
 e of my burdens , so I retreat , in a numb womb of purposeless business w  
 my own . and then , I retreat and revel in poetry and literature where th  
 ccept , affirm and not retreat into a masochistic mental hell where jealou  
 sal desire to escape , retreat , not talk to anybody . Thesis panic lack o  
 e . Perverse desire to retreat into not caring . I am incapable of loving ,

Figure 2. All instances of *retreat* in the Smith Journal

Wmatrix (Rayson, 2009). Figures 1 and 2 below, show all occurrences of the words *escape* and *retreat* in the Smith Journal.

What these two concordances show (and what the exploration of other relevant terms such as *withdraw* and *crawl back* corroborate), is that *retreat* is always **into** a different place: e.g., *non-thought*, *blubbering*, *numbness*, *womb*, *masochistic mental hell*, *not caring*. *Escape*, on the other hand, is always **away from** somewhere: e.g., *myself*, *something*, *rigid cage of routine*, *action*, *responsibility*, *freedom*. The interesting thing about these two patterns is that Plath seems to want to retreat to places that, most people would agree, should be avoided, while she wants to escape from things that most people would consider normal parts of everyday life. In this sense there seems to be a conflict between 'normal' perceptions and how reality is perceived by Plath.

### 3. Conflicted Self Metaphors

At this stage I would like to turn to metaphors where the idea of conflict is more fully explored with examples of metaphors of explicit inner conflict. I shall tentatively use the umbrella term *CONFLICTED* or *SPLIT SELF* metaphors to denote these examples. There are instances in the Journal where Plath tends to write about different selves within her. She seems to separate out various parts of herself and

usuous haze . Sure , marriage is self expression , but if only my art  
 comes from a vague core of the self -- like a disease of the blood  
 y , war , economics , death and self . What a pathetic blighting of  
 m I ? My stubborn unimaginitive self can not conceive of him as a f.  
 s , a miscellaneous crowding of self and activities and a brief nome  
 happy with my newfound selfless self . Or I could devote myself to  
 've got to feel emancipated and self important somehow . God Forbid  
 ttle ambitions for my conceited self , but shall be content in serv  
 I can only love ( if that means self denial or does it mean self fu.  
 ans self denial or does it mean self fulfillment ? Or both ? ) by g  
 oth ? ) by giving up my love of self and ambitions why , why , why .  
 being quite only concerned for self alone , but mostly so . An eas  
 w . Next year I will not be the self of this year now And that is wh  
 re not the wiseguy in your best self , but so much more - fine and s  
 world touch one . But my honest self revolted at this , hated me fo  
 . My seventeen-year-old radical self would perhaps be horrified at  
 decision , but the freeing of the self is part of this , too . I must  
 can counter my vibrant dynamic self : sexual and intellectual . and  
 create & love people & give of self like mad . go outward in love &  
 t force beyond your own limited self . God , god , god : where are :

Figure 3. All instances of *self* in the Smith Journal

write about them as if they were independent. This effect does not always come about solely through metaphors. For example, in *My stubborn unimaginitive self cannot conceive of him* (117) and *But my honest self revolted at this, hated me for doing this* (155), *self* is potentially used metonymically (as it refers only to a part of the whole).<sup>6</sup> However, the sense of split is achieved more by the fact that a part of the self is being contrasted via the adjectives with another part of the self. There is added metaphoricity in that the part of the self is also personified in these examples by *conceive*, *revolted* and *hated*.

Finding examples of such references to a split self using corpus methods is not difficult. The best indicator or key word is *self*. In fact, a search for precisely that lexical item produced 20 concordance lines (Figure 3), of which 8 were instances of the metonymical use of *self*. The frequency (8/20) suggests that this is a very common way of indicating a distinction between selves.

Split selves have been discussed in detail by, most notably, Emmott (2002), but also by Lakoff (1996). While I will refer to these authors, my notion of split selves needs to be understood as a wider umbrella term. Additionally, here I will mainly be discussing more explicitly metaphorical examples.

As these metaphors deal with the idea of 'self', I find it useful to work with a definition of sorts to specify the ways in which a self can split. Ramachandran (2003) proposes that the self should be understood as consisting of four inter-connected characteristics: continuity of time (a sense of past, present and future),

unity or coherence (sense of completeness), embodiment or ownership, and agency (Ramachandran, 2003). Based on this definition, a split in the self can occur at least at the first three levels (also see Emmott, 2002).<sup>7</sup>

In terms of continuity, there can be a split between the selves at a Time A and Time B. Because people inevitably change over time, the fact that someone feels like a different person (in the everyday sense) at the present from ten years earlier does not automatically constitute a split in the sense that I am using the term. What I would consider a split in the self are cases where the old self and the new self are not reconcilable. In the same way, there can be a split in terms of unity when two irreconcilable or very clearly distinguishable parts, or even complete selves, are present at the same point in time. The irreconcilability can be manifested in overt conflict or disagreement between the various selves or self parts. Another common form of split is that between the mind and body, which falls under embodiment. A mild or temporary discrepancy between the mind and the body is quite a common experience (the body is tired, but the mind is alert for example), but a split occurs when either of the components develops a will or agency of its own. This is also the case if the split occurs not between the mind and the body, but between two body parts for example. A split of both embodiment and unity could occur in the case of what Barnden (1997b) calls *MIND PARTS AS PERSONS* metaphors:

Under this metaphor a person's mind is viewed as having "parts" that are themselves people — or at least complete minds — having their own thoughts, hopes, emotions, and so forth. [...] Different inner persons can have conflicting mental states, or a mental state held by one can be failed to be held by another (Barnden, 1997b:4).

The main examples of split self in the Smith Journal are splits in unity and/or embodiment and account for about 10% of the metaphors of mental states identified in the manual intensive analysis. Example 5 is a collection of these types of metaphors (note that some elements of Example 5i were discussed above).

Example 5 *SPLIT SELF* metaphors

- i. to feel his mind soaring, reaching, and mine caged, crying impotent, self-reviling an imposter (154)
- ii. it was good to let go let the tight mask fall off, and the bewildered, chaotic fragments pour out (155)
- iii. My world falls apart crumbles. "The center does not hold." There is no integrating force (154)

There is a strong sense of conflict in Example 5i. Firstly, the example suggests a split of embodiment, in the sense that the mind is caged (as discussed above)

separately from the body. Secondly, the mind is endowed with a personality of its own, suggesting a split in unity. This is similar to Barnden's (1997a) *MIND PARTS AS PERSONS OR OTHER ANIMATE BEINGS* metaphor, with the exception that the whole mind is conceptualized as a separate person. There is not only conflict (*crying, self-reviling*) between the selves in Example 5i, but also a sense of desperation. This is evoked by *impotent*, which can be seen as another nested metaphor (belonging both to the source domain of physical illness and lack of movement). Additionally, *imposter* (aside from being another form of personification) has connotations of subversion and intentional deceit.

Lines ii and iii in Example 5 are perhaps more marginal cases of the documented split self metaphors. In fact they could also be called 'fragmentation' or 'coming apart' metaphors — there is clear reference to the falling apart, or disintegration of either the self or the surroundings. However, the disintegration refers to the sense of unity — of being one coherent being. In these examples the sense of unity disappears, creating another form of the split self metaphor. What is particularly interesting about these examples, is that there is an equal and opposite pattern of metaphors of positive mental states. Positive mental states are sometimes referred to as *self-integrity* or as being *integrated*. Although the fragmentation metaphor is not particularly well documented in the psychology literature, Goatly et al. (2002–2005) do include examples of the *MENTAL DISTURBANCE IS DIVISION/INCOMPLETENESS* metaphor in the Metalude databank. It seems that these examples fall into that category. In addition, *mask* in Example 5ii is a more explicitly metaphorical manifestation of the self metaphors discussed by Lakoff and Johnson (1999). It could be seen as a distinction between an inner and an outer self (or a private and public self).

#### 4. Contextualization and conclusions

In this paper, I have discussed some of the metaphorical expressions of mental states that are present in the Smith Journal of Sylvia Plath. I focused particularly on metaphors of *MOTION* and *SPLIT SELF*. Metaphors of *MOTION* accounted for 21% of metaphors of mental states in the Smith Journal and could be grouped into three main systematic metaphors: *MENTAL STATE IS LACK OF MOTION*, *MENTAL STATE IS UNPRODUCTIVE MOTION*, and *MENTAL STATE IS MOVEMENT AWAY*. *SPLIT SELF* metaphors were about half as frequent in the Smith Journal but were interesting for their expression of inner conflict.

*MOTION* metaphors were generally to do with either a lack of progress/movement or with movement in an undesirable direction in the sense of the *PROGRESS IS MOTION FORWARDS* submapping of the event structure metaphor. I suggested



that *LACK OF MOVEMENT* metaphors convey a sense that negative mental states are unpleasant and difficult to get out of. They also convey an aspect of inevitability or lack of control/helplessness of negative mental states. In *LACK OF MOVEMENT* metaphors, whether externally or internally imposed, the experiencer was not constructed in a way that would allow them to overcome the stagnation. Expressions implying circular unproductive motion such as *wallowing* and *whirlpool* also convey this.

Similarly, there was an element of inevitability in the *MENTAL STATE AS MOVEMENT AWAY* metaphors: the metaphors construct the experiencer on the losing side of a potential struggle where the only way to prevent annihilation is through retreat. Another way of looking at these expressions is to see them as conveying the unpleasantness of negative mental states. Specifically, *MOVEMENT AWAY* metaphors imply that there is something unpleasant that needs to be avoided. Interestingly, what Plath's language constructed as 'to be avoided' was *freedom, responsibility* etc. — elements of everyday life that most people would consider desirable.

*SPLIT SELF* metaphors suggested that the experiencer's inner world or various aspects of their self are separated and/or in conflict. This sense of conflict is apparent in expressions where various parts of the self seem to have opposing attitudes and wills. A similar sense of conflict was also noted in some stylistic features of the examples, where lexical items with contrastive meanings occur in close textual proximity. It should also be noted that some *SPLIT SELF* metaphors can also be seen as a counterpart to the *MENTAL STATE AS WHOLENESS* metaphors of positive mental states. This suggests a relatively stable conceptual scenario.

I also briefly noted that a sense of intensity (of the mental state) in the Smith Journal can also be created by textual patterning (mainly repetition), as well as interaction with literal and hyperbolic references. Other aspects of mental states are most often conveyed through the interaction of various source domains in textual clusters and through the (sometimes multiple) entailments of vehicle terms. In this process, the usefulness of some corpus methods was also commented on.

The metaphors people use when expressing, in particular negative, mental states could be helpful in understanding the inherent difficulties in overcoming these states (Meier & Robinson, 2006). Similarly, understanding linguistic conceptualizations/modelling of mental states and the self can contribute to self-awareness and may therefore have implications for clinical psychotherapy. Pennebaker and colleagues (Pennebaker & King, 1999; Pennebaker, Mehl & Niederhoffer, 2003) repeatedly emphasize that the way people talk (and think) about mental states and traumatic events can influence future recovery. McMullen and Conway (2002) also suggest that therapists need to pay more attention to the way patients use language in order to be able to treat them more competently and comprehensively. Future research should therefore focus on describing the patterns of



different mental states (perhaps assessed through psychological tests) in order to create a typology of metaphors associated with them. Once metaphor typologies are readily available, their applications in psychotherapy can be explored in detail (for a comprehensive discussion of this see McMullen, 2008).

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## Notes

1. In all quoted examples the metaphorical expressions relating to mental states or the self are underlined.
2. I have included 'the self' in this specification as people's view of themselves is connected to their mental state. As such, descriptions of the self can be indicative of mental states.
3. Such examples, and indeed most unconventional metaphorical expressions, also lend themselves to an analysis in terms of conceptual blends (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). This however, is beyond the scope of the present paper.
4. Although some of the pronouns in these examples are second person pronouns, they do still refer to Sylvia Plath, making the metaphors expressions of her mental state. The change in pronoun use is explained by the fact that some of the entries in the Smith Journal were written using *you* to designate Plath.
5. Although 'emotion' is a narrower concept than 'mental state' for the purposes of the comparison of their metaphors, the two will be treated as synonymous.
6. It should be noted that very similar examples have been analyzed as metaphorical by Lakoff (1996) and Lakoff and Johnson (1999). They are supposedly common and the various 'selves' (1) are associated with different social or professional roles for example (e.g., someone can be a mother as well as a daughter; someone can *speak professionally*), or (2) can consist of the distinction between public and private personae. In fact, the distinction between metaphor and metonymy is often difficult to draw (and is not necessarily of consequence at this stage). As Barnden (2010) argues, it best understood as a matter of degree, or as a useful shorthand to distinguish between 'tendencies'.
7. Although Emmott (2002) discusses similar types of split selves, it should be noted that my own definition is somewhat different from (and broader than) Emmott's. For Emmott, "cases of a character or real life individual being divided and/or duplicated in any way" (2002, p. 154) are considered split selves. My own understanding includes all of these as well, but additionally includes a fragmentation of identity.

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