

Sylvia Plath and Becoming-Minority

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Key words: becoming-minority, Sylvia Plath, Deleuze and Gattari, becoming-animal, becoming-woman

I. Introduction

The poetry of Sylvia Plath has been examined from diverse perspectives since her death, and, in particular, numerous studies have focused on her biography and death. Biographical facts have been meticulously reviewed in Plath's case and analyses of the causes of her death and discussions on the theme of death in her works have been especially numerous. In an analysis of the poet's psychology leading to her death, Ernest Shulman stated, "For Sylvia Plath, the death of her father led

to a symbiotic attachment to mother, featuring a compulsive need to win awards... Thus Plath's use of first person plural is not merely a poetic flight of fancy; it expresses an ecological verity" (Schulman 610-11). Regina Barreca has gone beyond the analysis of individual psychology and evaluated Plath as a poet who linked her female identity to death. "Death acts as a shaping principle for an existence fraught with a fear of shapelessness: if nothing else can be relied upon, at least death provides a boundary" (Barreca 175).

Unlike existing criticism on Plath's death, this article starts with regarding becoming as a key theme of Plath's poetry. Her poetry holds desire for flight and energy for life that cannot be interpreted into leading to death, and such energy can be best understood when it is interpreted from Deleuzian perspective. Indeed, studies that have analyzed the poet's works from Deleuzian framework include Yoo Jeong Hwa's article¹ and Baek Keum Hee's.² Yoo Jeong Hwa has meticulously examined three lines of flight in Plath's poetry: the molar line, molecular line, and line of flight. However, she does not seem to address becoming or becoming-minority. As for Baek Keum Hee's study, contrary to the title, it hardly deals with the issue of becoming in actual analysis. By analyzing Plath's poetry from the perspective of Deleuze's becoming-minority, especially becoming-animal and becoming-woman, this article seeks to reveal the yearning for life in and the ontological depth of Plath's poetry that hitherto have not been highlighted.

The term "becoming-minority" refers to the process through which beings arranged in an arborescent system as a minority flee from solid identities, become new molecular beings, and, moreover, bring about the collapse of the arborescent system itself. He calls the pyramidal and solid

¹ Yoo Jeong Hwa, "Reading Sylvia Plath's Poems with Deleuze."

² Baek Keum Hee, "Sylvia Plath's Poetry: Poetics of 'Flight and Becoming.'"

hierarchical structure an “arborescent system,” at the apex of which the white male exists. In this hierarchical arborescent system, identities in each category only perform duties assigned by higher levels. When examined more closely, the arborescent system is based on the binary oppositions of majority-minority/ruler-ruled. Deleuze and Guattari stress the fact that, in binary oppositions, there always are categories that serve as central points. The central point of the male wields even more power, and categories including female, animal, child, etc. are defined within their relationships to the central point (Cho & Yoo 251).

Deleuze’s becoming does not mean a simple transformation or transition. It signifies fleeing from the arrangement assigned by the hierarchical arborescent system or becoming free from the norm of the majority, and therefore “becomings are minoritarian; all becoming is a becoming-minoritarian” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 291). Becoming-minority such as becoming-animal and becoming-woman signifies not becoming a member of a minority with a solid identity arranged in a binary opposition but rather fleeing from the identity of a molar being assigned by the arborescent system and becoming a new molecular being. For example, a woman as a molar being means “the woman as defined by her form, endowed with organs and functions and assigned as a subject” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 275). Becoming a woman or an animal is utterly different from such a molar being. Here, becoming a woman or an animal means to become “Molecular collectivities, haecceities, not molar subjects, objects, or form that we know from the outside and recognize from experience, through science, or by habit” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 275).

This article sees the theme of Plath’s poetry as what Deleuze and Guattari have termed “becoming-minority” and seeks to evaluate the poet as depicting yearning not for death but for life and, moreover, as presenting an alternative order through becoming-minority. In order to

achieve such goals, this article examines the ways in which solid identities arranged in the arborescent system are portrayed and the ways in which fissures develop in these solid identities. It then examines how molecular animal and woman come into existence after flight from molar beings in the arborescent system. As for becoming-animal, this article analyzes the ways in which a human being achieves the true ontological position by sympathetically responding to the energy exhibited by animals after subverting the hierarchy of superiority/inferiority between humans and non-humans. In terms of becoming-woman, it also reviews the ways in which Plath not only resists and expresses anger at the binary opposition of male/female, but also vividly depicts women as molecular beings possessing new energy and speed. Finally, this article assesses Plath not simply as fleeing from the hierarchical arborescent system but as proceeding further and presenting an alternative order of rhizomes.

II. The Arborescent System and Solid Identities

The arborescent system has the central point called the male at the top of this hierarchy. Within the arborescent system, not only the structure itself but also the identities in each of its categories are solid. "Tulips" demonstrates just how oppressive such identities are to those defined as members of an inferior minority. In this poem, the speaker who is a member of an inferior minority conforms to her arrangement and consoles herself that she has obtained peace. On the other side, however, her being itself has been completely annihilated:

The tulips are too excitable, it is winter here.
 Look how white everything is, how quiet, how snowed-in
 I am learning peacefulness, lying by myself quietly
 As the light lies on these white walls, this bed, these hands.

I am nobody; I have nothing to do with explosions.
 I have given my name and my day-clothes up to the nurses
 And my history to the anaesthetist and my body to surgeons.

I am a nun now, I have never been so pure (160-61)³.

Here, the speaker says, “I am learning peacefulness.” In fact, however, she has relinquished her name and everyday clothing to the nurse, her history to the anesthetist, and her body to the surgeon. The peace of the speaker of “I am nobody” is therefore possible only after she acknowledges herself as an inferior being in the arborescent system. Indeed, she has thoroughly internalized the attributes demanded by the hierarchical order. When she says, “I am a nun now, I have never been so pure,” the purity that she alludes to is an attribute allotted to women by the male ruling order.

The oppression inflicted on an individual by the solid structure is represented as the influence of the tulips on the speaker:

The tulips are too red in the first place, they hurt me.
 Even though the gift paper I could hear them breathe
 Lightly, through their white swaddlings, like an awful baby.
 Their redness talks to my wound, it corresponds.
 They are subtle: they seem to float, though they weigh me down,
 Upsetting me with their sudden tongues and their color,
 A dozen red lead sinkers round my neck (161).

One critic has seen the vivid color of the tulips as “a call from life” (Yoon Joon 10). However, it should be seen as signifying the oppression that the speaker feels when she is forced to conform to her solid identity. Oppression is simultaneously external, as in “they weigh me down,” and

³ Plath, Sylvia. *Collected Poems*. London: Faber and Faber, 1981.

internal, as in “Upsetting me.” Now, the speaker realizes that she is in an immovable state, with “A dozen red lead sinkers round my neck.”

Furthermore, the tulips now make it difficult for the speaker even to breathe. Although the poem starts peacefully with words such as “nobody” and “nun,” peace is no longer possible. The speaker acutely perceives the fact that the other side of this peace is death:

And I have no face, I have wanted to efface myself.
The vivid tulips eat my oxygen (161).

Individuals arranged in the hierarchical structure are not simply restricted or constrained in their positions. Conformity to that arrangement directly signifies the deprivation of life itself.

“Daddy” demonstrates both the oppressiveness of the arborescent system and anger against it. “Daddy” starts with revealing the oppression inflicted by the solid hierarchy. However, unlike “Tulips,” “Daddy” expresses anger at such oppression, thus fundamentally questioning solid identities, unlike “Tulips”:

You do not do, you do not do
Any more, black shoe
In which I have lived like a foot
For thirty years, poor and white,
Barely daring to breathe or Achoo (222).

This poem reveals, to an extreme degree, the oppression of arborescent system, at whose apex is the male. At the top is the father; and the speaker, a female and a child, is arranged in the lowest position as a powerless being and must accept the identity forced on her by this arrangement. Due to her internalized identity, the daughter’s being itself is confined, like a foot in a shoe. However, as Rietz said, “The overt

subject of this poem is not her oppression but rather her triumph in resisting it—in repudiating her muse and finding her own voice” (Rietz 425). Here what Plath wants is “To dismantle the interiority of the “shoe”-house, revealing its contents” (Narbeshuber 189). Furthermore, as Yoo Jeong Hwa has pointed out, the speaker’s awareness, which strongly rejects the being of the father, is conveyed through the negative adverb ‘not’ repeated from the first line” (Yoo 164). The fact that this poem starts with the word “not” reveals that the speaker is preparing resistance in an oppressive order. Such resistance on Plath’s part is expected to lead to flight from the arborescent system.

III. Becoming-Animal

As for Plath’s attitude toward nature, critics have pointed out either her lack of interest or psychology projected on it. According to Helen Vendler, Plath does not give nature its own status. Adam Kirsch also has pointed out that the poet only created the world in her own image. Similarly, Terry Gifford has criticized Plath for using nature in order to depict her internal life. Scott Knickerbocker stressed the poet’s affinity to nature more than those mentioned above. According to him, Plath sought to portray the wildness and vitality found in nature and, moreover, felt a biological bond to nature rather than to humans, identifying very strongly with diverse animals (Knickerbocker 4-8). However, what the poet attempted was not the simple identification of the human or the subject with nature, or the object, but was becoming-animal, where one responds sympathetically to animals with one’s whole being and becomes a new being.

The most common misunderstanding about becoming-animal is to mistake it for mimicking animals’ gestures or shapes. However, becoming-animal is not for one to perform mimicry but to change into a being

with the speed of and the ability of animals' bodies. The speakers of Plath's poems variously attempt to become animals possessing molecular energy and, in the end, become molecular beings with the speed and strength of animals notwithstanding occasional frustration.

Plath's exploration of becoming-animal starts with "Blue Moles," where the speaker does not simply feel pity for the wretchedly dead moles as victims but resurrects these animals as beings with new powers:

They're out of the dark's ragbag, these two
 Moles dead in the pebbled rut,
 Shapeless as flung gloves, a few feet apart –
 Blue suede a dog or fox has chewed.
 One, by himself, seemed pitiable enough,
 Little victim unearthed by some large creature
 From his orbit under the elm root.
 The second carcass makes a duel of the affair:
 Blind twins bitten by bad nature (126).

One of the first moles to appear is depicted as a victim, which is at the lowest level even in the animal hierarchy. Though it is unclear whether this animal has been bitten by a dog or a fox or killed by a large beast, the mole is a "Little victim" that is smaller than and fatally threatened by larger animals such as dogs and foxes. Presumably dead due to defeat in a fight, another mole likewise is presented as a victim of "bad nature." Plath links these animals to "victim[s]," "some large creature[s]," and "bad nature," thus highlighting the moles' position as a powerless minority in a hierarchy.

But Plath does not end in seeing these moles, or victims, merely as objects deserving pity. Her unique power lies in deconstructing the boundary between humans and animals and attempting becoming-mole herself:

Nightly the battle-snouts start up
 In the ear of the veteran, and again
 I enter the soft pelt of the mole (126).

In the power dynamics symbolized by “battle-snouts,” the speaker is a member of an inferior minority—like the moles that are bitten by “some large creature[s]” and victimized in a world where only the fittest survive. As a way of fleeing from domination by power, she attempts to become a mole which is part of the weakest minority. The moment she goes inside the “soft pelt of the mole,” her flight from her solid identity as a member of an inferior minority begins. Instead of becoming a mole, or a “victim,” she becomes the “soft pelt of the mole.” In the expression “soft,” the mole as a victim defeated and bitten in a fight disappears.

The speaker then shows a body affected by the strength and speed of moles:

They go before: opening the veins,
 Delving for the appendages
 Of beetles, sweetbreads, shards—to be eaten
 Over and over. And still the heaven
 Of final surfeit is just as far
 From the door as ever (126-27).

Moles are no longer members of a minority, or “victim[s],” and have fled completely from a solid identity. Instead of moving along already paved, straight spaces, they create new nomadic spaces, “opening the veins,” and exhibit vitality, “Delving for the appendages.” Such strength and speed are unique to these animals, and the speaker’s body has come to respond sympathetically to their speed and strength. Here she says, “And still the heaven / Of final surfeit is just as far.” But this cannot be seen as expressing the frustration that moles are inevitably victims. Nor can the

speaker be viewed as having completely succeeded at becoming-mole. Plath still hesitates to become a mole.

In “Veil” (also known as “Purdah”), the speaker overcomes all hesitation and succeeds in becoming-lioness, or becoming-animal. At the beginning of this poem, she reveals a solid identity that has conformed, to an extreme degree, to the patriarchal order of male domination/female subordination:

In among these silk
Screens, these rustling appurtenances.
I breathe,. . . (243).

The speaker feels she is an inferior human, even an inferior object. In “these rustling appurtenances. / I breathe,” she is indistinguishable from expendable goods. She feels that “I am his. / even in his / Absence,” which signifies not merely that women are subordinate to men but that her identity has been completely fixed as his possession, or as an object.

However, she suddenly breaks out of her solid identity and starts her flight:

I shall unloose-
From the small jeweled
Doll he guards like a heart

The lioness,
The shriek in the bath,
The cloak of holes (243-44).

Park Jooyoung noted and interpreted her act as resistance based on the fact that the speaker, previously a conforming doll and a being of silence, now is a “lioness,” “shriek[ing,]” and that a “cloak of holes” replaces the

veil that covered her face earlier (Park Jooyoung 478). From a feminist perspective, Lee Jung-won has also pointed out that the speaker, formerly a woman who, “as a plaything, a sex slave of a man, was wrapped by layers of veils and belonged only to one single man like a concubine in a harem,” attempts resistance and escape and rises as the lioness that was dormant within (Lee Jung-won 6-7). These critics have stopped at thus pointing out the extreme change from conformity to resistance. However, the meaning of becoming-lioness can be more properly interpreted when it is examined from the perspective of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s becoming-animal. Here, transformation occurs instantaneously and is absolute. Suddenly becoming a lioness, the speaker demonstrates a line of flight where she departs completely from her previous identity: “Shining like a flash, the line of flight ruptures all boundaries, severs itself from all segments, and resolutely leaves the territory” (Yoo Jeong Hwa 155). With “I shall unloose” as a signal, becoming-lioness occurs in a flash, and she becomes a completely new being. The “cloak of holes” shows that she now has the strength of a wrathful lioness. In other words, she is no longer an “appurtenanc[e]” or a “small jeweled / Doll” but is a new molecular being, possessing the energy and the speed of lionesses. The lioness is not merely a metaphor for resistance but signifies her ontological change.

Becoming-animal shows its complete form in “Ariel.” Here, we encounter the speaker, who has fled completely and become a horse, galloping with force:

Stasis in darkness.
Then the substanceless blue
Pour of tor and distances.

God’s lioness,
How one we grow,

Pivot of heels and knees! – The furrow (239).

Park Ryung has stated, “When the speaker starts to ride on the horse, the ‘substanceless blue’ pours down, and she becomes one with Ariel, which is ‘God’s lioness’” (Park Ryung 91). When the meaning of this union is examined in detail, it is clear that the speaker has come to possess the speed and rhythm of horses and to respond sympathetically to horses. As Yoo Jeong Hwa has pointed out, “Riding on Ariel, the speaker is no longer a single figure or subject but becomes a bundle of powerful and vivid sensations, an aggregate of sensations” (Yoo Jeong Hwa 167). Here, becoming-horse is not to enter the inferior arrangement of the horse in the binary opposition of human/horse but to become “God’s lioness,” a molecular being full of energy.

VI. Becoming-Woman

As a woman poet, Plath has been analyzed from diverse points of view. In particular, feminist critics have pointed out the oppressiveness of and resistance against patriarchy. Park Ryung has traced Plath’s growth as a woman poet. More specifically, Park Jooyoung has analyzed the poet’s depressive anger against the patriarchal order. Arguing that to view Plath merely as a victim or as an angry woman is to underestimate her works, Tracy Brain has focused on the poet’s resistance. Taking a cultural approach, Christina Britzolakis views Plath’s poetry as ironic self-analysis in response to the cultural objectification of women. It is true that feminist criticism has analyzed female anger and resistance more sensitively and in greater depth than any other type of criticism. However, there are aspects of the poet’s works that cannot be fully understood only as anger or resistance. Plath sought to transcend the position of empirical women and to become a molecular woman, and such attempts can be

interpreted more clearly from the perspective of Deleuze's becoming-woman.

It may sound odd for a woman to become woman. However, the former woman is a molar one in the arborescent system and possesses a solid identity; and becoming-woman signifies fleeing from the identity of a molar woman and becoming a molecular woman: "the woman as a molar entity *has to become-woman*" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 275). Becoming-woman is becoming not a woman on the empirical level as we know, but a molecular woman (Cho & Kim 2017, 248). Becoming a molecular woman means "emitting particles that enter the relation of movement and rest, or the zone of proximity, of a microfemininity, in other words, that produce in us a molecular woman, create the molecular woman" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 275).

Regarding the importance of becoming-woman, Deleuze and Guattari have even stated, "it must be said that all becomings begin with and pass through becoming-woman" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 277). This is because the male exists in the heart of power: "the majority in the universe assumes as pre-given the right and power of man. In this sense women, children, animals, plants, and molecules are minoritarian. It is perhaps the special situation of women in relation to the man-standard that accounts for the fact that becomings, being minoritarian, always pass through a becoming-woman" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 291). In other words, the most important aspect of the majority is the fact that the male is the norm, and becoming-woman is a representative movement fleeing this norm (Cho & Kim 269).

In "Ariel," the speaker takes her first step in becoming-woman by identifying with Lady Godiva:

White
Godiva, I unpeel—

Dead hands, dead stringencies (239).

The wife of a feudal lord in 11th-century England, Lady Godiva accepted her husband's suggestion that he would remit the taxes imposed on his tenants if she would ride on a horse naked in the streets in broad daylight. The condition was that all residents would stay at home, with the windows closed. The one person who broke this promise and peeped at her supposedly became blind (Park Ryung 92). Here, Lady Godiva cannot be seen as having succeeded in becoming-woman. This is because although she helped the weak, which is one of the images assigned to molar women, she has yet to become a molecular woman. In a structure where her husband is at the apex of power, she both resists and accepts his tyranny by riding naked as he suggested. And at the same time she is still an object of the male gaze when a person tries to peer at her.

The heroine of "Ariel" attempts becoming-woman that will overcome such limitations of Lady Godiva. She says, "I / Am the arrow," and with the image of an arrow, the speaker becomes a molecular woman who has fled from and transcends Lady Godiva's limitations. Here, the energy or fluidity constituting the molecular woman is depicted as an arrow and dew:

And I
Am the arrow

The dew that flies
Suicidal, at one with the drive
Into the red

Eye, the cauldron of morning (239-40).

Many critics have focused on the dew rather than the arrow, especially

“The dew that flies / Suicidal.” Han Eun Won has seen the dew flying into the sun as “self-destructively yearning for death” (Han Eun Won 488-89). However, what we should note here is the energy that the arrow has. Although not analyzing from Deleuze’s and Guattari’s perspective of becoming-woman, Victoria Anderson has already noted that the speaker turns into a state of energy: “The enduring sense of ‘Ariel’ is precisely that of an *absence* of body; but not death so much as a transition to a state of pure energy” (Anderson 92). The speaker does not disappear but becomes the strong energy itself. As Yoo Jeong Hwa has pointed out, “Flying toward the sun as a line is an explosion of energy and a flash-like flight where one completely leaves the solid territory, shakes off one’s body, and deconstructs one’s self” (Yoo 168). The disappearance of the dew, which is aimed at the sun “as if committing suicide,” signifies not death but the destruction of a solid identity and the transcendence as a molecular woman.

“Fever 103°” shows the completion of becoming-woman. This work vividly demonstrates the process through which a woman’s potential effloresces, thus taking her to becoming-woman. “The most important term in ‘becoming woman’ is neither noun nor adjective, but verbal gerund, designating ‘becoming’ as a line of flight ... woman is not a goal or term, but a potential, a valence” (Flieger 47). The efflorescence of potential starts by problematizing purity itself: “Pure? What does it mean?” (231). Purity is the most important attribute defining one as a woman in the solid segments of hierarchical male/female opposition. Here, women are forced to be pure, and those who fail to satisfy the standards of purity are classified as “whores.” As has already been examined in “Tulips,” the speaker conformed to male standards of purity to an extreme degree, “I am a nun now, I have never been so pure.” Now, however, she realizes that purity restricts and confines her:

The indelible smell

Of a snuffed candle!

Love, love, the low smokes roll

From me like Isadora's scarves, I'm in a fright

One scarf will catch and anchor in the wheel,

Such yellow sullen smokes

Make their own element. They will not rise, (231)

Here the speaker is still trapped in “such yellow sullen smokes.” She has been arranged as a female in the binary opposition of male/female, and the smokes metaphorically symbolize the fact that she cannot free herself from her solid identity. Although smoke rises to the sky, this smoke, “like Isadora’s scarves,” binds her to her solid identity, which will lead to her death. However, her desire for flight causes fissures in her identity: “Darling, all night / I have been flickering, off, on, off, on.” These fissures are signs that her solid identity is no longer solid. The speaker says, “I am a lantern,” which does not symbolize weakness or imminent disappearance but shows a flickering and fractured identity and the beginning of flight. Consequently, it has positive connotations instead of signifying frustration or fear.

At last, the speaker attains perfect flight. “Acetylene” is utterly different from the “smokes” that tied the self to a solid identity, to death. She really “rise[s]”:

I think I may rise-

The beads of hot metal fly, and I, love, I

Am a pure acetylene Virgin

Attended by roses,

By kisses, by cherubim,
By whatever these pink things mean. Not you, nor him

Not him, nor him (My selves dissolving, old whore petticoats) – To
Paradise (232).

Though many critics regard the change into “Acetylene” as signifying death, it is rather related to (re)birth as a new being called “acetylene / Virgin” after the destruction of a previous solid identity. While the solid identity is likened to the petticoats of an aged prostitute, the virgin receives blessings from “roses,” “kisses,” and “cherubim.” Here, the roses and the kisses are not impure. Rather they completely subvert the existing virgin/whore dichotomy and refer to the real ‘purity’. Here, the virgin demonstrates becoming-girl, which is a model of becoming-woman in Deleuze’s view.⁴ The moment she is (re)born as a “pure acetylene / Virgin,” the speaker becomes a being existing between male/female and between adult/child. This virgin’s “purity” differs from conventional “purity.” The initial definition of “purity” has been completely overturned so that she is passionate yet pure at the same time. With the virgin/whore dichotomy no longer an issue for her, she becomes a molecular woman as free as gases. Involution into a girl is by no means a regression but a model of becoming-woman, where the potential of a woman is fully realized.

⁴ Deleuze and Guattari have explained, “She never ceases to roam upon a body without organs. She is an abstract line, or a line of flight. Thus girls do not belong to an age group, sex, order, or kingdom: they slip in everywhere, between orders, acts, ages, sexes; they produce *n* molecular sexes on the line of flight in relation to the dualism machines they cross right through”(Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 276-277).

V. Conclusion: Rhizomatic Imagination

This article has thus examined the ways in which Plath's poetry breaks free from solid identities in the arborescent system, flees from the hierarchy, and reaches becoming-animal and becoming-woman. It has examined the ways in which Plath is in the process of new becoming instead of ending in anger and resistance. This is made possible by becoming-minority: becoming-animal and becoming-woman. The poet's exploration of becoming-animal starts in "Blue Moles" and her flight is extended to becoming-lioness in "Veil." While existing criticism has pointed out only the change from conformity to resistance, this article has interpreted this complete departure from solid identity as a line of flight from Deleuzian perspective. Responding in perfect sympathy to the strength and speed of animals, becoming-animal is completed in "Ariel." Here, we encounter a speaker who has succeeded in becoming a vigorously galloping horse, "God's lioness", as a molecular being full of energy.

"Ariel" also shows the development from becoming-animal to becoming-woman. While the disappearance of the dew toward the sun has been interpreted as a trajectory toward death, it can be interpreted as the transformation of one's being itself into fluid energy from Deleuzian perspective. In "Fever 103°," the speaker becomes finally a molecular woman a "pure acetylene / Virgin," which corresponds to becoming-girl described by Deleuze. The "purity" of this virgin completely subverts the meaning of the initially questioned "purity," thus signifying a change into a passionate yet pure being. Having reached the state of a virgin, the speaker becomes a molecular girl as free as gases. This involution into a girl can be interpreted as displaying a model of becoming-woman.

Such becoming-animal and becoming-woman do not stop at individuals' changes but further develop into the formation of rhizomes. Deleuze and Guattari explain "A rhizome as subterranean stem is

absolutely different from roots and radicles. Bulbs and tubers are rhizomes”(Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 6). If the arborescent system forms a hierarchical order consisting of components such as trees, branches, leaves, and roots, rhizomes are lumps of energy depriving of any hierarchy. Rhizome is not a series of progress, regress, or derivative relationships, unrelated to any classification or the arborescent system, and passes along the line of flight. For Deleuze and Guattari, “becoming is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree”(Deleuze & Gattari 239). Becoming does not progress or regress along a series, or operate by filiation, but is more in line with infection or contagion, which passes along lines of flight unconnected by a generic series(Jones 129-30).

A poem that represents Plath’s rhizomatic imagination well is “Mushrooms.” This work shows us the ways in which a molecular individual not only exhibits explosive energy but also succeeds in forming the alternative structure of rhizome. Here, the mushrooms are “us.” They are not mushrooms as objects of observation; we ourselves are the mushrooms. Regarding this, Knickerbocker has stated, “She not only personifies the mushroom but speaks from their point of view ... Thus Plath’s use of first person plural is not merely a poetic flight of fancy; it expresses an ecological verity”(Knickerbocker 8-9). However, when interpreted in terms of Deleuze’s becoming, this does not merely represent discourses from mushroom’s perspective. Rather, we have reached becoming-mushroom.

Perfectly voiceless,
Widen the crannies,
Shoulder through holes. We

Little or nothing.
So many of us!
So many of us! (139)

Nudgers and shovers
In spite of ourselves.
Our kind multiplies:

We shall by morning
Inherit the earth.
Our foot's in the door (139-40).

Already having reached becoming-mushroom, we at first create fissures in the solid structure with the strength and speed of mushrooms and “Widen the crannies, / Shoulder through holes.” Having succeeded in making fissures in solid segments, the mushrooms proliferate when its kind “multiplies.” The mushrooms demonstrate the power of rhizomes mentioned by Deleuze: “It constitutes linear multiplicities with n dimensions having neither subject nor object”(Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 21). When such mushrooms take over the earth “we shall by morning /Inherit the earth” and an alternative order appears. Through becoming-animal and becoming-woman, Plath shows not only the flight from the oppressed positions in the solid hierarchy but also the new world created by molecular beings demonstrated in “Mushrooms.”

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