

Sublimation in the Work of May Sinclair: “The Flaw in the Crystal”

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
ADAM AND EVE	10
SUBLIMATION	14
THE UNCANNY STRANGERS WE ARE TO OURSELVES	17
FICTION	22
CONCLUSION	52
BIBLIOGRAPHY	59

This thesis argues that desire in May Sinclair's "The Flaw in the Crystal" (1912), is depicted as a driving force urging a new paradigm for the male/female relationship in modern society. It begins by exploring the symbolic meaning of two female icons of the Judaeo-Christian traditions; Eve and Mary, and how their images have contributed emotionally as well as physically to woman's development and affected man's. While deconstructing the text and grammatical structure of its semantics, this essay asks the reader to consider the internal and personal process of sublimation required to attain the spiritual/physical merger encouraged in Sinclair's text as well as how that reflects on the external and collective process. Finally, it offers the reader a vision of how these processes not only mirror each other but present a more active way to participate in human evolution.

INTRODUCTION

Two years shy of the beginning of the end of *The Old World Order*¹, in 1912, English writer May Sinclair (Mary Amelia St. Clair Sinclair) (1863–1946) was calling for the beginning of the end of another world order; the patriarchal society we are still deconstructing today. A once popular but, unfortunately, today little known author of poetry, short stories, essays, and twenty-four novels, she also wrote two book-length philosophical studies of idealism². She is arguably like no one before her, nor anyone after, and perhaps that explains why it was difficult to place her in the English canon of literature. She deals with psychic themes that are often marginalized from society and therefore, widely unexplored by the general public; reasons, perhaps, why there

¹ This phrase is often used in reference to the outcome of World War I (1914–1918).

² in which she evaluates, from the perspective of idealism, Sigmund Freud, Henri Bergson, William James, William McDougall and psychical reseracher Frederic Myer's work, *Human Personality*(1903)

has been very little written about her original and daring work, and why there needs to be more.

In 1904 her novel *The Divine Fire* was a best seller in America, and when she first visited the United States in 1905–06, men and women of letters in New York and Boston vied for the privilege of entertaining her (Neff 1980:83).

Sinclair has been called “A Modern Mystic” (Thrall 2005:1), a “pioneer in psychological fiction” (Neff 1980:1), is credited with first using “stream of consciousness” as a literary term, and has also been called “a pivotal writer in the development of the ghost story”(March–Russell 2006:14). She is considered as well, a “Late Victorian”, and a precursor to Virginia Woolf. She was closely associated with the Imagist and Modernist schools of literature [(influencing T.S. Eliot, H.D, Dorothy Richardson (it was in a review of her work that she first used the term stream of consciousness), and Ezra Pound among others)]. She also protested the banning of D.H. Lawrence’s *The Rainbow*, was involved in psychoanalytic circles (both Freudian and Jungian), and her interest in the psychic realms led her to help found and finance the Medico–Psychological Clinic, in Britain in 1913 (Johnson 2004:2) and to become a member of The Society for Psychical Research in 1914. A member of the Aristotelian Society and the Women Writers Suffrage

League she has said that if she were not a “mere novelist” she would be a suffragette. (quoted by Gillespie 1985:235)

In the early 1920’s Sinclair was recognized by Thomas Moulton as “the best and most widely known female novelist”. The critic, John Farrar, stated, at that time, that she was “the greatest analyst in fiction” and the poet Jean de Bosscher’s opinion was that she was “the least conventional of women writers.” (both quoted by Johnson 2004:1)

As recently as 2004, George Johnson claimed that she “remains the most undeservedly neglected Edwardian novelist who made the transition into modernism (Johnson 2004:1). And in 2008, she is still being talked about: “Sinclair’s tales subvert our usual expectations of creepy stories. Philosophy is never far beneath the surface.” (Duncan 2008:1)

When she died in 1946 at the age of eighty-three, she was all but forgotten by her contemporaries and since, many (myself among them) consider that she has never received the recognition she deserves, nor ever been considered a canonical writer. A deeply private person who abhorred self-promotion, she retired to the country, completely disappearing from the literary scene sixteen years

prior to her death, due to the progressively debilitating effects of Parkinson's disease.

“Ironically, as Sinclair’s celebrity declined, a phrase that she had helped to popularise (‘stream of consciousness’) became one of the most conspicuous literary terms. This odd coincidence, though, was somehow appropriate since Sinclair had been one of the most intellectually driven of writers, pursuing the ‘new’ and the ‘modern’ in philosophy, psychoanalysis, mysticism and the paranormal. Her *Uncanny Stories*(1923) are of a piece with both her ideas and her life-story.³ (March–Russell 2006:7)

The women’s movement in English society at that time held the assumption that “women are what their circumstances have made them, not what they eventually must be.” (quoted in Gillespie 1985:238) At a time when women were seeking and gaining more physical and material independence; (the right to be educated at a university level, to be political, to work at interesting professions and keep their earnings, to own property, to seek custody of her children in instance of separation, to use birth control, to dress as she liked and to be herself) there was also a need to gain *emotional, spiritual, and psychological* independence.

For thousands of years, culture inculcated the human psyche with the idea that woman, in being intellectually and socially inferior,

³ “The Flaw in the Crystal(1912)”, the story I will analyze in this thesis, is included in this collection.

weaker, and wanton by nature, needed man to survive on every level. Therefore, she needed to sacrifice her self to purify her self so that she could fulfill the requirements of marriage and motherhood, a theme which occurs repeatedly in the fiction of single Sinclair. It was, and obviously still is, difficult to see how that idea alone entirely was, and is, responsible for the depths to which it nestled into the collective and personal unconscious.

Woman and man had become like the machines that were industrializing the world, machines that paradoxically were referred to in the female form as angels when fulfilling the duties culture had imposed upon them.

Sinclair had never been, nor arguably wanted to be, *The Angel in the House*,⁴ though her caretaking of her dying brothers and mother after her father's bankruptcy, subsequent alcoholism and early death imposed a semblance of that position upon her. She was a working woman when not many were, supporting her mother through her writing until her mother's death in 1901.

⁴ The popular Victorian image of the ideal wife/woman came to be "the Angel in the House," who was expected to be devoted and submissive to her husband. The Angel was passive and powerless, meek, charming, graceful, sympathetic, self-sacrificing, pious, and above all--pure. The phrase "Angel in the House" comes from the title of an immensely popular poem by Coventry Patmore, in which he holds his angel-wife up as a model for all women. (www.academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/thackeray/angel.html - accessed 25 April, 2007)

In Sinclair's letter "How it Strikes a Mere Novelist", she explained that though her own self-interest as a self-supporting single woman kept her from joining the suffrage movement due to the concern of jeopardizing her position, she believed the vote for women would prove valuable both in society and art, two domains Sinclair passionately argued needed an injection of women's values. "If the twentieth century recaptures the spiritual certainty threatened by nineteenth century materialism," she wrote, "it will do so because of women artists and women voters." (quoted in Gillespie 1985:236)

She wrote the essay, "Defence of Men" in 1912, the same year that she wrote "The Flaw in the Crystal". In this defense she deals with the one generalization about men and women⁵ she maintains as viable; that Nature has marked women for childbearing and therefore, this biological fact has had certain consequences; the major one being that the product of the physical suffering of this childbearing is a virtue that man does not have, due to the lack of physical sacrifice required by his role in procreation. (Gillespie 1985:238)

In Sinclair's opinion, the man sacrifices his "spiritual prospects", not his body. She agrees, therefore, with some feminists that man "in matters of sex feeling and sexual morality...is different from and

⁵ It is important and interesting to note as well that in examining the relationships between men and women in her fiction, she presents infinite variations without generalizations about men or women. As Gillespie noted in her essay, "The Muddle of the Middle", "Qualities and interests traditionally attributed to one sex are likely to appear in Sinclair's fiction as characteristic of either (1985: 237-238)."

inferior to women.” (Gillespie 1985:238) She claims uncertainty as to whether that is due to physiological or sociological reasons though she concludes that socialization has followed the dictates of physiology.

She empathizes with the human situation and concurs that neither sex can blame the other for the consequences. “If we are what men have made us,” she said, “men are, on the most favourable showing, what we have permitted them to be.” (quoted in Gillespie 1885:238)

The aforementioned essay was her effort to defend men from the feminists who stripped them of all virtue. She felt that feminists who excused women for less productivity in the arts and sciences, due to the childbearing nature and social norms that followed therefrom, ought also to excuse men, in turn, for their lack of spiritual development due to the time and energy required of them; whom nature had designated as breadwinners resulting from their minimal role in the reproduction of the race. She does, however, note the contradiction between man’s inferior sexual morality and the fact that for ages he has been the creator of spiritual ideas and systems. (cited in Gillespie 1985:238)

ADAM AND EVE

The *Bible* and the *Torah* are two such examples of the spiritual ideas and systems created by men. Sinclair, greatly interested in the Eastern mystics, educated herself away from the Christian dogma she was raised in, as well as living in. She believed it crippled individuals and society.

“Christianity, which is based on a metaphysical and moral dualism, antagonism between soul and body, and separation between God and man... took to itself the ritual of the world it conquered; but it refused the one thing in that ritual which was necessary to its own salvation – the simple sacramental attitude to life. In spite of its beautiful doctrine of love and mercy and pity, it was instinct with the spirit’s cruelty to the flesh...it is this failure of a spiritual religion to be spiritual enough, that is at the root of half the evil and the sickness and the suffering of the modern world.” (D:248)⁶

“Because man hates evil and shrinks from pain, there *must be* a Dual principle; there must be Another, the scapegoat of a God not quite almighty, upon whom all the evil in the world may be fastened...In exchanging God the Father for God the Absolute Self, that irresponsible dependence which has kept men and women for centuries in a pathetic infancy (will be lost).” (D:139)

I would like to focus for a moment on the two main female roles of the fictions created, and/or perpetuated by the male writers of the *Torah*(the character of Eve), and the *Bible* (the character of the Virgin Mother Mary). I argue that these female characters are fantasies of

⁶ From Sinclair’s philosophical treatise, *A Defence of Idealism: Some Questions and Conclusions*. 1917. All future references to this work will be noted by *D* and the page number.

the male imagination, and therefore there is not only no natural need for these scripts, there is much to be wary of in regards to the creator's intentions. I also argue that these stories simply answered a cultural desire to control women (and men, in turn, by perhaps, or not, unforeseen consequence) in order to fulfill the culture's desire to reproduce itself.

In these fictions, Eve was punished for her desire for knowledge and blamed for tempting Adam with it. Mary was praised for never questioning, accepting all, and sacrificing everything for her male child and God, the Father; she is connected to that symbolic order only through relationship to the males within it.

Why did the Jewish writers create a woman out of man only to tempt him to know? And why was this desire given a fleshy and sexual taint? Why was Jesus written as a male child? Why did the writers of the Bible not give Mary a girl child, too? Again, I would argue that these are attempts of a patriarchal society to control the female (and subsequently male) by sub-ordinating and defiling the desirous nature of Eve (who represents the body) while revering the impossible qualities of Mary (who represents the pure soul).

Not only did this reverence encourage woman into in a constant state of failure to meet these patriarchally imposed standards, perpetuating the constant antagonism between body and soul

mentioned above, man was also set up in the eternal frustration of wanting a “pure” mate to match that symbol, yet desiring a real woman. It was/is the base of neurosis and schism.

The etymology of the name, *Eve* comes from Hebrew *hawwâ*, *living life*, from *hâyâ*, *to live*. To condemn her is to condemn life. We have seen Eve living life, desiring knowledge, obtaining it, being banished from boring Eden because of it, and then blamed for eternity for having tempted Adam. From this perspective, and grammatically speaking, one sees that Eve is the subject, desire the verb, knowledge the object, and Adam, in not assuming responsibility for his action, the indirect object. Or, one can consider God as the subject, and Eve and Adam as the objects. In either case, a lack of responsibility appears, where desire is concerned, and in both cases a lack of male responsibility may be noted. Also, in both cases there is a scapegoat; either Eve, or God. Somehow Adam avoids fault. (I don't think a female writer would have let him get away with that.) Could Adam not have simply said no, thank you, to the apple, and stayed on in Eden as Eve was sent out to make her way in the world?

If we remove gender from the paradigm of Adam and Eve; and consider Adam as representative of the human being and Eve as representative of the desire to know and the apple representative of

knowledge we have the perennial love triangle necessary⁷ for the perpetuation of desire, and therefore, life. One can then see the combination of circumstances as such: the human being is powerless to say no to the desire of knowledge and it is desire's fault, not humanity's. But how do we separate the two? Humanity is, is it not, the child of desire? "Desire is the cause of Life," Sinclair stated (D:329).

Does it not follow, then, that desire belongs as well to the spiritual world? Since the first myth was told, since the first Symbol was created, human beings have longed for a joining of the imaginary world of the spiritual and the real of the material world, as if they were two different places. As Sinclair herself explained in *A Defence of Idealism*, ever since man placed his gods away from him, he has longed to rejoin them, he put them in the sky and looked for them there, had he put them in the ground, he would have looked for them under his feet. It is a key to her belief in the human being's inherent capacity for evolution and self-determination that she has man placing his gods, rather than being placed by them.

"The Flaw in the Crystal" acts out this desire to join the realm of the spiritual (Mary) to the the realm of the physical (Eve), and in so doing, reveals the absurdity of the dualistic opposition set up between

⁷ Further interesting reading on this is found in Anne Carson's *Eros, the bittersweet* (1986).

these two inseparable realms as it simultaneously posits the evolutionary power of their communion.

SUBLIMATION

I am quite convinced that Sinclair would point to sublimation as the instrument of this communion. It is (in the best sense) what Mary was asked to do with her desire in order to purify it. Sinclair left behind an incomplete manuscript, "The Way of Sublimation", which is part of the May Sinclair Collection at The University of Pennsylvania. After years of psychological, philosophical and spiritual studies, Sinclair came to this conclusion:

"To me this theory of sublimation is the one thing of interest and of value that Professor Freud and Professor Jung have contributed to Psychology... Roughly speaking, it is the diversion of the Life-Force, of the Will-to-Live, from ways that serve the purposes and interests of species, into ways that serve the purposes and interests of individuals. Roughly speaking all religion, all morality, all art, all science, all civilization are its work...The perfect individual is the person perfectly adapted to reality through the successive sublimations of his will... At first sight, it seems obvious that sublimation should involve repression....At any age there is a limit to the desires the individual can satisfy and the pursuits he can follow with success. Sooner or later a selection must be made; and, other things equal, the beauty and the worth of the individual will depend on the beauty and the worth of the interests he chooses for his own. All sublimation is a turning and passing of desire from a less worthy or less fitting object to fix it on one more worthy or more fitting.

In the healthy individual there is no more danger in this turning and passing than in the transition from infantile baldness to a head of hair. But for the neurotic every turning, every passage, bristles with conflict and disturbance...

Now the psychoanalyst tells you that wherever there is repression without sublimation there is a neurosis or psychosis. It would be truer to say that wherever there is repression there is no sublimation, and wherever there is sublimation there is no repression. The will-to-live has found another outlet, the indestructible desire another object, and all is well. For the happy normal individual, desire is never repressed, it is either directed and controlled, or it wanders of its own accord into the paths of sublimation (Psychoanalysts, out to vilify the Unconscious, have not paid sufficient attention to the facts of *unconscious sublimation* and all that they imply)." (D:6-7)

Considering Sigmund Freud's (1856-1936) and Carl Jung's (1875-1961) studies of the psychological process of sublimation, the subtle difference this writer detected between Freud's understanding and Sinclair's, more aligned with Jung's, is her firm conviction that repression is not included in the process.

According to Freud, impulses must be sublimated by subordinating the "pleasure principle" to the "reality principle", and this results in repression of the desire for pleasure, burying it eternally in the Unconscious, even after it is supposedly sublimated. This implies that there is not only no pleasure in sublimation, but that it is more of a conscious repression of desire than a transformation of that psychic energy into a more fulfilling desire. Where Freud considers the desire for sexual pleasure, one of the oldest and most basic urges that

all humans feel, Sinclair simply considers it is the desire for life and evolution, and considers the libido in the Jungian sense of “creative energy”, as she preferred. (Neff 1980:87–88)

As Frederich Nietzsche (1844–1900) undoubtedly had an influence on Sinclair and the kinship of their beings is noted in their consideration of literature as philosophy, their criticism of Christianity, and their conviction concerning the importance of sublimation. The two subtle differences that I note between their considerations are that Nietzsche, like Freud believes repression is required, and for him what is sublimated is the “will-to-power”, man’s desire for glory, superceding the desire for life or sex.

I will also work with two texts of poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926); *Rilke on Love and Other Difficulties* (1975), and *Letters to a Young Poet* (1934); while analyzing Sinclair’s *Flaw*, due to the infinite parallels easily drawn between her and his consideration of the possibility of new and more interesting human relationships. Rilke wrote about sublimation without ever using the word; the texts mentioned are filled with commentaries on the sublimation of sexual desire into art. Rilke’s theory of sublimation, like Sinclair’s, does not involve repression, but refined selection. His insistence that love must be applied to the sexual experience is a sublimation in itself.

THE UNCANNY STRANGERS WE ARE TO OURSELVES

Before moving into the analysis of the text, I must also introduce Sigmund Freud's essay, "The Uncanny" (1919), as another tool of interpretation, specifically because Sinclair titled the collection of stories in which we find "The Flaw in the Crystal", *Uncanny Stories*, and published it within four years of the appearance of Freud's essay. I do not think this is a coincidence, but an answer to it; Sinclair's version of what is uncanny, so to speak. I like to think it is in response to Freud's admittance in the fourth paragraph of his essay, that

In his study of the 'uncanny'; Jentsch quite rightly lays stress on the obstacle presented by the fact that people vary so very greatly in their sensitivity to this quality of feeling. The writer of the present contribution, indeed, must himself plead guilty to a special obtuseness in the matter, where extreme delicacy of perception would be more in place. (Freud 1919:1)⁸

There is every reason to believe that Sinclair considered her perception more delicate and subtle in such matters.

Of the many different aspects of Freud's exploration of the meaning of *unheimlich*, translated into English as *uncanny*, I will

⁸ All future references to this essay will be from the version cited in the bibliography and will be noted with a *U* in front of the page number.

mention those that I believe pertain most to Sinclair's fictions, and "The Flaw in the Crystal", in particular. As Freud points out in the beginning, the uncanny seems to lie in the class of the frightening, though I would argue that it is not always so, at least in English, but that sense is defined in German. An *unheimlich* house is considered a haunted house, but an uncanny house, for example, is an expression rarely if ever used. The uncanny in English relates more to situations and relationships, and as Freud states, *qualities of feeling*. This analysis of Sinclair's text will more often work with the German sense.

Freud explains that what excites fear is the fact that *unheimlich* is not a clearly definable word, or feeling, which suggests to this writer that it lies more closely to what is real than imaginary. The extent of the variations within the word, and its translation across cultures, exhibit definitions from joy to fright (*U:2-4*) suggesting both the subjectivity of its meaning and the inability to describe it. It also has the interesting quality of leading us back to what we have long known (*U:1*), and is, similar to the supernatural, attached to a feeling of intellectual uncertainty(*U:2*).

Just as the human being belongs to both the spiritual and physical world of ideas, the world *heimlich* belongs to two sets of ideas, without being contradictory while being different; it is on the one hand what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other what is

concealed and out of sight (U:3–4). These qualities as well relate to the supernatural, and to the spiritual aspect of physical matter.

The term *unheimlich* is also used to describe the action of something repressed which recurs (U:11), whether frightening or not – this frightening factor is associated with the psychoanalytic theory which argues that every affect belonging to emotional impulse is transformed into anxiety when repressed – so when it recurs, it carries that anxiety, but the strangeness is therefore not alien, it is only the desire that has been alienated through repression. Hence, the feeling of familiarity within the strangeness.

In Part II of the essay, Freud credits Jentsch's opinion that one of the most successful devices for easily creating uncanny effects in literature is to leave the reader in uncertainty whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton and do it in such a way that his attention is not focused directly upon his uncertainty so that he may not be led to go into the matter and clear it up immediately. (U:5) I cannot help but think of the clever and subtle manipulation involved in the creation of the symbol Mary as an automaton; an automaton woman then aspired to emulate. This automaton sense of the uncanny, of *unheimlich*, is, as well, connected to the characters of "The Flaw in the Crystal" and society in general in a metaphorical sense where we see people acting like conditioned automatons in the modern world.

Another interesting parallel to consider while analyzing this *Uncanny Story* is Freud's notation that it often happens that neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about female genital organs due to the fact that it is the entrance to their former "home" or *heim*. The only two male characters in "The Flaw in the Crystal" are neurotic and both are drawn erotically to the woman that is healing them.

In relation to Sinclair's mystical interests, *Heimlich* also carried a meaning of mystical knowledge (*U:4*), and the meaning of the word develops in the direction of ambivalence until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*. This does not suggest that *unheimlich* is a lack of mystical knowledge, but more interestingly that it is a forgotten repressed knowledge of it, considering the prefix *un* of *unheimlich*, as Freud does, as being "the token of repression" (*U:12*).

Sinclair's fiction deals with this mystical knowledge that human beings have repressed for so long it has become strange to them, yet it feels familiar.

Nietzsche, as well, argued that we are strangers to ourselves in this uncanny sense. As Gemes eloquently paraphrased Nietzsche, "We lack knowledge about our deeper motivations, but in the more profound sense, we are estranged from ourselves in that we contain

repressed drives and affects that are split from each other and that, in the place of a unified whole we moderns are but a jumbled energy of competing drives.” (2007:1) The way back home, according to Nietzsche is by way of a higher unity in the nature of the soul of a people, one created through the disappearance of the disruption between the spiritual and the physical.

Rilke, again, without ever using the word in the texts previously mentioned, explores the uncanny throughout them. In 1904, he wrote “...nothing strange should befall us, but only that which has long belonged to us.” [Rilke 2000(1934):49–50] His writings urge humanity to remember what is long forgotten due to repression, most specifically of the sensual:

Why have they made our sex homeless, instead of
making it the place for the festival of our competency?
... why do we not belong to God from *this* point?
...- my sex is not directed only toward posterity, it is
the secret of my own life – (Rilke 2004 (1975) :32)

These intersecting points of the work of Rilke, Sinclair, Nietzsche, and Freud on desire, sublimation, and the uncanny—and their kinship—fascinate this writer. What I want to explore here, in both the context of Sinclair’s fiction and the new paradigm for male and female relationship that emerges from it, is the quality of sensual desire within desire, and its relation to sublimation and the uncanny.

FICTION

First, we must take a brief look at Sinclair's 1907 story "The Judgement of Eve", in which we are introduced to a bright, young and pretty protagonist named Aggy who has her pick of the young suitors in town, but is in no hurry to marry. As she approaches her decision, we learn

"and then—either she was a happy married woman or, said Aggie, coyly, a still happier old maid in Queningford forever. It was surprising how little the alternative distressed her."⁹

Pressured by both culture and desire, Aggy decides to marry the man that she finds more spiritual of the two, then dies of exhaustion seven years and seven babies later, the intellectual thrill of her early married life long and soon gone after the first couple of children. The fact that Sinclair titled Aggy's demise, *The Judgement of Eve*, suggests that Eve did not choose so well for her self, that Eve could not survive in Mary's world.

Agatha Verrall, a telepathic healer, and the protagonist of "The Flaw in the Crystal" is Eve, already in a house of her own; more than a

⁹ All references and quotes cited from "The Judgement of Eve" have been accessed at <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/19658> without page numbers.

decade before Virginia Woolf suggested the necessity of just one room for a woman writer. The reader assumes she is self-supporting, though no mention of profession or money is ever made. In her own garden, that 1912 alternative space to motherhood, she is an alter-ego to the Aggy of *Judgement of Eve*. As Aggy is a diminutive of Agatha, we can consider Ms. Verrell as a grown up Eve, the old maid living that life in the country that young Aggy in *The Judgement of Eve* imagined to be less distressing than the married one she chose. As Rebecca Neff commented, “The name ‘Agatha’ was a happy choice for Sinclair...for in Greek it denotes the good, the noble, the strong, and the brave.” (Neff 1980:104)

The novella opens with *he* as the subject in the first sentence, much in the same way that the twentieth century opened with the male as the subject. And the woman, Agatha, is waiting for him and expecting nothing of him, albeit in a place of her own. “They had left it that way in the beginning, that it should be open to him to come or not to come.” (59)¹⁰ The choice, it is clear, was *his*.

Yet, it is also suggested that the *he* in question, Rodney Lanyon, did not have much choice about it; “He had to, or he would have broken down. Agatha called it getting away from ‘things’; but she knew there was only one thing, his wife Bella.” (59)

¹⁰ All future references to the text of “The Flaw in the Crystal” will be numbered by page only from the edition cited in the bibliography.

Here again, it appears to be the woman's fault that man is not well. The reader is never told why Bella is not well, only that he, Rodney, is "wedded to a mass of furious and malignant nerves"¹¹ (59) that he cannot handle. It appears that Adam regularly flees his neurotic Mary to find "his place of peace" with Eve. Again, continuing with the analogy of body and soul, one could argue for another metaphor; that man regularly flees his neurotic soul to find a place of peace in his body, through sensual desire and the fulfillment of it. Rilke speaking on physical pleasure warned about this sort of exchange; "the bad thing is that most people misuse and squander this experience and apply it as a stimulant at the tired spots of their lives and as a distraction instead of rallying toward exalted moments." [Rilke 2004(1934, 1903):28]

"It had been understood for long enough (understood even by Bella) that if he couldn't have his weekends he was done for...Of course she didn't know he spent the better part of them with Agatha...It was not desired that she did know...Her obtuseness helped them..." (59)

Though it is never clear if there is a physical sexual relationship between Rodney and Agatha, it is clear that they have known each other for a long time, at least from the time of Bella's "younger and saner days". "She (Bella) used to say that she had never seen anything

¹¹ A revealing metaphor for the marriage of soul to body.

in Agatha” and therefore she was oblivious to the “extraordinary, intangible, immaterial tie” (59) that held Rodney and Agatha together.

What is this tie? Is it love? Desire? Real? Supernatural? All of the above? I would argue it is desire being first repressed then sublimated out of love; “The love beyond desire” that is the key to the Sinclair influence on T.S. Eliot’s work. (Neff 1980:83)

By not speaking about the physical sexual aspect of this primary relationship in the text, it adds to the uncanny feeling throughout, the one that is both familiar and kept out of sight, and it leaves the reader free to delve into the other intimate aspects of relationship; deeper and more mysterious than the physical; most especially the psychic (of which the emotional is a part).

“...she had swept herself bare and scoured herself clean for him. Clean she had to be; clean from the desire that he should come; clean above all from the knowledge that she now had, that she could make him come...” (60)

Agatha believes that “the power, the uncanny, unaccountable Gift”, (elsewhere in the story referred to as “the secret, the inexpressible thing”) she “discovered, wonderfully, by divine accident...could always get at him.” (60) This gift, when capitalized as Gift¹², carries with it the meaning of psychoanalysis itself, as well as

¹² see Pfeiffer, Ernst (ed). Robson Scott, William and Elaine (trans). 1985. *Sigmund Freud and Lou Andreas-Salomé. Letters*. W.W.Norton. New York.

telepathy, which is what Agatha uses to “heal” the characters in the story. Nicholas Royle In his book, *The Uncanny* (2003), draws an interesting link between the two:

“Telepathy, like the uncanny, bears an uncanny relation to psychoanalysis. The pertinence (and impertinence) of telepathy in the context of psychoanalysis lies in its status as a foreign body that, exemplarily in Freud’s own writings, can neither be accepted or rejected. (quoted by Allison 2004:279)

Agatha is afraid of this power, or more precisely of herself in control of this potentially manipulative power, “...supposing it could get at him to make him do things?... Nothing could be more horrible to Agatha... To have tried to get at him would have been for Agatha the last treachery, the last indecency.”(60) This exemplifies Sinclair’s desire to remove manipulation from relationships, which Johnson also noted in his assessment of her work; “Over the course of her fiction she (Sinclair) becomes more explicit about probing the disastrous consequences of repression and also misuse of one’s sexuality as a tool of manipulation.” (Johnson 2004:6)

The libido was considered by Sinclair in the fullest sense of its psychic, emotional, and physical energy. Her character, Elizabeth, in *The Dark Night* (1924) realized that merger between the symbols of Eve and Mary toward which I am reaching; “She need not renounce her carnal self in order to affirm her spiritual self, for while the Self exists

on two planes – the temporal and the timeless – the physical self belongs only to the world of material reality.” (Neff 1980:91)

One could argue that Agatha is unconsciously sublimating the desire she is repressing, if one considers Sinclair’s own conviction in that possibility. In the narration of Agatha’s mind, we are told only that she is repressing it, not allowing it, scrubbing herself clean of it, which, of course, implies that it is dirty. Which is perhaps the saddest word ever associated to the infinite possibilities for beauty in the act.

This desire, however, is indestructible. And as she hears the click of the gate announcing Rodney’s arrival, “her almost unbearable joy became suspense, became vehement desire to see him and gather from his face whether this time also it had worked.” (62) The *it*, is the telepathy that she has been focusing on him in his absence. Here it appears that she is more interested in measuring the power she wields, than she is in him.

It is clear from Sinclair’s descriptions of the two presences, facing each other, that they are enthralled with each other. Yet their exchange is filled with repressed desire and pretense. Rodney is unaware of Agatha’s “Gift”, much as I would say the individual is unaware of his own. She is “curing” him without his knowledge. Shortly after his arrival, he says, “You’ve been found out,” (63) and Agatha worries, curiously, that he is speaking about the “Gift”, as if the

revelation of the secret might result in a horror of some degree. She is relieved when she realizes that he is speaking about the imminent arrival of Milly and Harding Powell, neighbors who have also come to the country for reasons of health, who Rodney has seen at the train station prior to his arrival.

Rodney reminds her that they had agreed to keep their meeting in her country house something between themselves. And,

“As he stared in dismay at what he judged to be her unspeakable indiscretion, the thought rushed in on her straight from him, the naked, terrible thought, that there *should* be anything they had to hide, they had to be alone for. She saw at that time how defenceless he was before it; he couldn't keep it back; he couldn't put it away from him. It was always with him, a danger waiting at the threshold. (65)”

This passage is exemplar of Sinclair's description of a human being's relationship to desire. (D:259)

This is where she decides to attempt to not only repress her own desire but Rodney's as well; “her gift would now work more beneficently than ever... she had only to apply it to that thought of his, and the thought would not exist.” (65) I would argue that the attempt to obliterate another's thoughts is a form of psychic violence. Yet, Agatha, seemingly decides the ends justify the means;

“Since she could get at him, she could do for him what he, poor dear, couldn't perhaps always do for himself.; she

could keep that dreadful possibility in him under; she could, in fact, make their communion all that she wanted it to be.”(65)

Agatha senses her ability to be a subject here, but the problem is that we have one subject (her) trying to take control of the meaning of a structure that contains two. In this way she is ignoring the shared responsibility of a healthy discourse in much the same way she is ignoring Rodney’s responsibility and choices for his own well-being.

Could one call that kind of manipulation an authentic communion? I say no. Nobody knows what is best for everyone. It is also a definite lack of respect for Rodney and his desire, a continuation of the disrespect she has already accorded her own. Yet, was she not educated that her main concern was to care for men and/or children? Can one blame her for doing as she was told?

Rodney wants her to believe that his only concern about their being found out is what people might think of *her*, when in fact, one can easily suspect it is self-directed, this concern:

“Her face mounted a sudden flame, a signal of resentment. She had always resented the imputation of secrecy in their relations. And now it was as if he were dragging forward the thought that she perpetually put away from her (64).

Both her repressed desire of him, and her anger at his disrespect, appear when she cannot avoid seeing that he wants to keep their meetings, and this desire, hidden. This relation of mutual disrespect results in more impossible discourse: Two subjects (Rodney and Agatha) pretending the third subject (Bella, and in Agatha's perception, her desire) does not exist, one (Agatha) thinking the other two are objects (Rodney directly and Bella indirectly as receptors of her healing), and the other (Rodney) relating to the two others (Agatha and Bella) as possessive pronouns (his), and the verb (their feelings and actions) being secret, results in more impossible discourse.

It must be mentioned however, that it is never clear if Rodney's concern over what people think is an embarrassment of coming to her for help because he attributes to his well-being to seeing her, or if it relates to the implications of a married man's presence in the house of a single woman, or if it is simply, his desire for her and his belief in her desire for him. In any case, there seems to be shame and desire involved. What is clear is that the external and subjective opinions of society are what he fears, save perhaps the fear of his own desire and where that may lead them both. He is worried about her, she is worried about him; there is no confidence, no trust. They are in the uncomfortable state of being strangers to themselves without realizing it. The man, however, acknowledges his sensual desire because he has never been taught not to.

The ultimate goal in curing Rodney, Agatha decides in self-sacrificing Mary-like fashion, should be his happiness with his wife. If she can heal her, it will heal Rodney—the main goal—because “all that was wrong with Rodney was Bella.” (82) Man must be healed and woman is to blame, is one part of the message. The other part is that woman must be healed *for* man, *by* woman.

When Rodney asks what the Powells have come to the country for, Agatha reveals that he has “Something dreadful; they say incurable... it isn’t anything bodily,” (66) she tells Rodney.

Interestingly, when Rodney mentions that he never knew this, and wonders why she kept this news from him, she says, “because you never tell me things...and because...I wanted you to see he doesn’t count.” (66) This leads the reader to believe that Agatha suspects a loverlike like jealousy from Rodney.

Rodney answers, “But, *she’s* all right, I take it?”(66) and we see a reversal of Rodney’s own story – that the only thing wrong with Rodney is Bella, according to Agatha (61), but here, Rodney does not blame Milly Powell, does not even consider she might be the cause. Perhaps because what he is most concerned about is, what he asks next:

“She’ll wonder, won’t she?”
“About us? Not she. She’s too wrapped up in him to notice anyone.”

“And he?”

“Oh my dear – he’s too much wrapped up in *it*.” (66)

At the risk of redundancy, I want to again emphasize here that the men are worrying about worlds unto themselves, and the women are worrying about the men, as most likely, they were educated to do.

Harding Powell is hiding when we are introduced to him, closing all the blinds in his room, because if he does not, “*he would be seen.*” (71) He has already apologized for the darkness in which they have found him. Is this Sinclair’s way of offering man’s apology for the darkness of the patriarchal system? What Agatha calls the Power, or *It*, Harding, calls the *Thing*.¹³ “The Thing that keeps me awake.” (71) His malady is never defined, though the reader is given the knowledge that for years he has been in and out of a sort of insanity that he himself has been able to recognize as such at moments. All of this is strikingly metaphorical to this reader; modern man has been in darkness, does not want to be seen, is able at moments to glimpse the insanity of his undefinable discomfort but cannot seem to, or does not want, to right himself. Sinclair would argue that his neurosis can be explained by the fact that he is turning away from evolution. (*D*:292–293)

¹³ They are called interchangeably “the thing” and “it”, throughout the text, when speaking about both or either character’s psychic sensibilities, which logically implies that it is the same force.

I argue that he does not want to be seen, after all, he has already asked his wife to hide him. (68) He does not want to be awake, because once he is, he can no longer avoid both being and facing the possibility that it is, perhaps, life that is pursuing him, asking him to wake up and evolve.

Agatha decides to heal him because, she justifies, “His case, his piteous case, cried out for an extension of the gift.” (72) Just as with Rodney, it is without his request or knowledge, and in the belief that his wife cannot. “Agatha couldn’t leave him there. She couldn’t (when she had the secret) leave him to poor Milly and her plans.” (72) Is this not meddling, even if it contains the loftiness of wanting to help within it? It appears there is also a flaw in that; a will-to-power, Nietzsche may argue, that manifests, which is understandable in a culture that allows a woman only this outlet for power.

The fact that Agatha and Milly, consider themselves strong and fine by themselves, yet both feel a need to heal the men they consider more important than themselves belies their emotional dependence upon them. It is *through* the men they are given their sense of importance and feeling of emotional fulfillment as they play their cultural role. Not only has she not been taught how to marshal her own boundaries, Agatha therefore does not realize that she is not marshalling or respecting the men’s.

... "I've got to make him feel protected," Milly says.
... "He *is* protected," Agatha insists. (68–69)

Even before she starts working on him, Agatha is hinting at a power greater than both of them that if they would let it, would relieve them both, even all, of their duty. This, too, is uncanny because she acts as if it is both familiar and strange to her, as if she does not believe it herself or why would she not let him alone? And why does Milly need to make him feel protected? Man is definitely set up as the most important and most needy, therefore the most childlike, character in this fiction.

All those years of the formerly mentioned inculcation in the female blood, without any education about healthy boundaries, results in this; that Agatha believes she can heal these people without their knowledge of it (an arguably arrogant attitude and a psychic manipulation), and not only not be harmed by it, but that their lack of participation in their own evolution will not be a deterrent to its progression. She seems to believe that she can do their work of sublimation for them.

"You could think of it as a current of transcendent power, hitherto mysteriously inhibited," (73) writes Sinclair, here suggesting it has always been there, available to us all. I argue that its inhibition was not so mysterious, but that it was inhibited, then subsequently

atrophied, because it was not useful in an industrial culture that wanted to control people.

Rilke wrote:

“That is at bottom the only courage that is demanded of us; to have courage for the most strange, the most singular and the most inexplicable that we may encounter... that mankind has in this sense been cowardly has done life endless harm; the experiences that are called “visions”, the whole so-called “spirit world”, death, all those things that are closely akin to us, have by daily parrying been so crowded out of life that the sense with which we could have grasped them are atrophied... [Rilke 2004 (1934,1904): 51-52]

It is familiar because it is what we are made of and strange because we don't recognize it, it seems we fear it. Why? Is it perhaps only because we cannot prove it? It lies in that uncanny realm of intellectual uncertainty. Is matter not simply the physical *appearance* of what we call reality? We can prove its existence, through that dimension, but how can we prove its origin? There is the scientific study evolution. For Sinclair, the is the deepest and oldest desire in humanity is a desire to evolve; “In obedience to its inner urging, the speck of protoplasm grows.” (D:30)

Does the origin of existence not belong to the same realm we call the supernatural? Does, therefore, desire not originate and belong there, too? Is that not its home? Is that perhaps a clue to what is *unheimlich* in sensuality?

“You made the connection, having cut off all other currents that interfered, and then you simply turned it on,” (73) Agatha includes the reader in her education of the self-discipline necessary to fully enter the spiritual and psychic realm wherein she comes into contact with the “Gift”.

...you shut your eyes and ears, you closed up the sense of touch, you made everything dark around you and withdrew into your innermost self; you burrowed deep into the darkness there until you got beyond it; you tapped the Power, as it were, underground at any point you pleased and turned it on in any direction.” (73)

Closing up the sense of touch can be read as an attempt to close off the carnal aspect of desire through shutting out the surface of sensuality so one could go deeper inside the mystery of one’s self—to reach beyond it—to its connection to the source of it; that greater power and wider realm of sensation.

Going-into-oneself and for hours meeting no-one – this one must be able to attain... We *are* solitary. We may delude ourselves and act as though this were not so. That is all. But how much better it is to realize that we are so, yes, even to begin by assuming it... [Rilke 1975:36,50]

Yet, meditating and telepathically working on Harding while naked on her bed (74) conjurs potent erotic images that seem unnecessary and dangerous to the wish to remain sense-less . “The walls of flesh”¹⁴,

¹⁴ This can also be seen as a metaphor for the manner in which the material physical world impedes spiritual communication between human beings, making them automatons.

(75) that our carnal desires compel us at times to devour as lovers, are what Agatha removes symbolically, in her mind, so she can get to the innermost essence of Harding with her healing powers and then hold him there. (75) This language, laden with sexual undertones, and her nudity, give the impression of a reaching out to another in a kind of spiritual coupling, but a coupling nonetheless.

Harding grows stronger and healthier daily as Agatha channels the Power into him every night. When Harding begins to question his new-found sanity, Agatha tells him, "I think it's something in you"(78), he answers, "Of course... but what started it? That's what I want to know. ... Something queer and spontaneous and unaccountable. It's - it's uncanny," he says. Again it is the basic triangle, the human being reaching out of desire to the knowledge always beyond him.

It is interesting to note Sinclair's consideration of the dreaming state as an example of the self's ability to travel in the worlds called consciousness and unconsciousness.

"When people come down in the morning and tell you that they have had a very remarkable dream...it does not occur to them how remarkable it is that anybody should have a dream at all... For the waking I remembers the dream experience not always perfectly; and the dream I remembers parts, at any rate, of the waking experience... That is to say, while preserving selfhood, it has transcended normal consciousness. (*D*:261-62)

“Will”, she says, “seems the surest and most conspicuous bridge from the inner to the outer world,” (D:69). So, if one can transcend normal consciousness while sleeping, why can one not will the same experience? “...that there are “powers” *some* powers, is I think, no longer in dispute,” she asserts. (D:266)

Because Harding denies the supernatural, Agatha believes it is not possible for her him understand that it is not her that is healing him. Yet, denying her own power this way, also keeps the knowledge from her, and maintains both of them as objects, which is why it cannot work.

Harding’s entire belief system would have to be reconstructed, just as society’s would, if it was believed that everyone could tap into this supernatural power and therefore be responsible, as subjects, for their own structure’s well-being. The subject would no longer be able to masquerade, or be masked, as an object with *another* subject to blame. This could result in freeing man and woman from an imposed dependency, allowing them to find out for themselves what they really need from each other.

Milly is convinced that it is “the place” that is curing her husband, and, for this reason, Agatha decides it best to tell her that it is not. “If you want it to last it would be better not to go on thinking it is the place,” she says. (79) At this point there is no evidence that

Milly is any more believing in the supernatural than her husband, but perhaps because she is a woman, marginalized by culture as Agatha is, and therefore more comfortable in the marginal realms where telepathy and the supernatural (and sex) are also shoved by modern and patriarchal society, Agatha confides in her.

“What do you *do*?”(80) Milly wants to know. Agatha is unable to explain in that uncanny not easily defined way, but she insists that it isn’t her. “...between the two regions of desire and expectation there is a dubious borderland:” Sinclair wrote,

“the region of the so-called supernatural powers, of which the mystic himself cannot say whether they are magical or spiritual: the power of healing, of vision, of clairvoyance, and clairaudience, of control over matter. This is the region where “miracles” are said to happen; though neither the believer in magic nor the mystic know what is really happening..” (D:250)

When Milly tells “I’ve prayed”, (80) suggesting that Agatha’s power perhaps was that, Agatha answers, “It’s not that — not anything *you* mean by it. And yet it is; only it’s much more, much more.” (80) Here the reader is offered a glimpse of Sinclair’s conclusion that Monism is the lineal descendant of ancient Mysticism, and the reason why prayer pales next to telepathy but is recognized as being of the same substance.¹⁵

¹⁵ See The New Mysticism chapter, *In Defence of Idealism* , pp 242 -245

Milly agrees that Harding would think “it was rot” (80) if Agatha told him what she was really doing, and that it is therefore best not to. The two women then negotiate a secret pact for her to continue to heal Harding without his knowledge. One might say woman is not making the mistake of offering man that damn apple again. However, it is disrespectful, even violent, to enter into another person’s psychic realm secretly, whatever the reason. On a deeper, subtle, and insidiously quiet level that forced entry into the psychic realm is what has happened to woman over thousands of years through the aforementioned patriarchal dogma, affecting man’s life as well, in its way, and is perhaps why it does not strike Agatha as wrong or inappropriate.

In this triangle, one of the two that Agatha is a part of, there are two subjects ignoring the job of the third. When Agatha insists to Milly, “you must not think it is me... And you must not tell him” (80), she is a subject, but acting as if she does not even exist in the discourse. Why not give Harding the option of believing? It seems to me it would be one way for him to start. Why not tell him? What does she have to lose? Is she perhaps stopped by the fear (still present in her genes) of being burned at the stake, or locked away in a madhouse, as so many mystics before her ?

What Agatha at this point has not discerned about this power is that it came *from* her not *to* her. It is only a prepositional error, but

one that transforms her from object to subject if she corrects it. This correction can also offer her the perspective and control necessary to handle the energy in a more responsible way. Keeping this power outside of herself, impedes her from seeing that she and it are not only permeable to each other, but inseparable. Distancing herself from it, inhibits her from taking her proper place as a subject, one able to sublimate desire, instead of repressing it as something that she does not own, thereby imposing a foreignness upon it, and making herself more of a stranger to herself than a collaborating confidante.

“It came one day, one night when she was at her worst. She remembered how, with some resurgent, ultimate instinct of surrender, she had sunk on the floor of her room, flung out her arms across the bed in the supreme gesture of supplication, and thus gone, eyes shut and with no motion of thought or sense in her, clean into the blackness where, as if it had been waiting for her, the thing found her.” (73)

Agatha, was tossed a beautiful verb here but she took her accustomed and humbled place at the end of things, as an object, by believing that “it” found her, instead of the more empowering and active choice, that she found it, which is after all suggested by the feeling that it had been waiting for her all along, to recognize it as part of her.

As Agatha gives more and more time to Harding in her channeling process, the Powells become dependent on her. Once more in grammatical terms, having given Agatha the place of verb and Harding that of object, and Milly that of indirect object, the subject is missing, even more so because Harding does not believe in the supernatural energy that Agatha considers the subject. Agatha, playing the verb by providing the action, begins to feel she is carrying Harding, the direct object, entirely by herself. And she is not wrong. By not involving his will in the process, was this not inevitable?

Interestingly enough this is when her desire for Rodney, (a subject), becomes acute and clear to her. Though she had continually tried to “purify” it through a loving act of sublimation, using “it” instead to work “the gift” on Bella because as she told Rodney, “I knew that if I could give Bella back to you that would prove, to me, I mean—that it was pure.” (110) She is still not seeing herself the subject of this desire, so she cannot perfectly sublimate it, it is false and against nature to consider Bella more worthy than her self.

Disturbed by what she had called the ‘lurking possibilities’ in Rodney; “she could now see they were nothing to the lurking possibilities in her.” (83) This is where she begins to realize her self as a subject. Now that Rodney is gone, and the disturbing feelings remain, she must own them.

Overwhelmed finally by holding and carrying both men in an intimate spiritual relationship that is clearly erotic, regardless of physical contact, she decides to cut Rodney off entirely, but still holding to Mary ideals, it is to save *him*, not her, from Harding's energy that is encroaching so on her sacred space she fears it may affect Rodney. Yet, this is *her* sacred space, the inner life, which Sinclair equated with "spiritual reality" (D:144), and Agatha is not standing guard over it as if it were her own; she is giving all of her psychic space to Harding. And it is endangering her own mental stability.

She had been prepared for it, but not as a thing that could really happen. It was contrary to all that she knew of the beneficent working of the Power. She thought she knew all its ways, its silences, its reassurances, its inexplicable reservations and evasions. She couldn't be prepared for this – that it, the high and holy, the unspeakably pure thing should allow Harding to prevail, should connive (that was what it looked like) at his taking the gift into his own hands and turning it to his own advantages against Rodney Lanyon.

Not that she thought it really had connived. That was unthinkable, and Agatha did not think these things; she felt them. Hitherto she had had not misgivings as to the possible behaviour of the Power. And now she was afraid, not of It, and not, certainly not, of poor Harding...she was afraid mysteriously, without knowing why or how (83–84)

Agatha believed she could control the unknowable and uncontrollable at the same time that she swore she was only allowing "It" to move through her. Because she accorded the supernatural force, Rodney, and Harding places of responsibility greater than her

own, she was acting as an empty vessel for this power without ever recognizing herself as its agent (which explains why she blames Harding, oddly enough; the non-believer as accomplice, if only for a moment). Again the uncanny sensation that Agatha is some sort of automaton, following dictates instead of making choices, prevails. I argue that this feeling of fright is only mysterious to her because in her world, the “modern” world, a woman is not educated or encouraged to be a subject unto herself, and that is precisely the place this force is urging her to claim.

Milly, in a selfish attempt to keep Agatha attached to her husband’s well-being, betrays Agatha’s wishes and tells him that Agatha is healing him. Agatha connects the date that he was told to the same day she had felt him prevailing so terribly, and she becomes more and more afraid, but now is able to clearly relate the fright to Harding’s dominion and persistence. “And with it all, unacknowledged, beaten back, her desire to see Rodney ran to and for in the burrows underground.” (85)

After six weeks of silence, Rodney arrives with the news that not only is Bella completely cured, she has also revealed to him that there has been another man in her life for years and that he is convinced that she does not care for him and that the only thing wrong with him is that he wants Agatha and cannot have her. Agatha insists to him that he doesn’t know what he wants (again a rather arrogant

approach). Here, for the first time in the story, Rodney attempts to take her in his arms, and she says, “We *can’t*.” (88)

Sinclair’s fiction has been “defined by the sincere attempt to sublimate the libido” (Neff 1980:107) and some consider *The Flaw in the Crystal* a story about sacrificing sexual activity to channel the sexual drive into more creative work, as much of Sinclair’s work is concerned with the female artist’s difficulties in having intimate human relationships and creative lives. For Sinclair, it was not whether or not a woman should marry, but *whom* she should marry, that made the difference. (Gillespie 1985:235–251)

I argue that Agatha’s refusal of Rodney’s advances, by saying, “Not *that* way. I don’t want it, Rodney, *that* way,” (88) was Sinclair’s suggestion that sublimation was also a way to a purer, more refined sexual experience, one that originated with two whole and unattached spiritual human beings, subjects unto themselves. Agatha wanted it that way or no way at all.

A walk outside with Harding, at the urging of Milly, results in a highly charged erotic conversation between Agatha and Harding, now that she knows that he knows, in which he tells her he could *feel* it was her, and she insists that he should not think it was her, that it was definitely not *her* that he felt. His disbelief in the supernatural, interestingly enough, does not allow him to believe it could be

anything but her yet the fact that it could be involves her belief in what he denies. "One oughtn't to speak about these things," (90), she warns, another characteristic of the uncanny, revealing Sinclair's concerns about how:

intimacy between two people, sexual intimacy especially, could threaten the integrity of the self as well as cause damaging psychic intrusion if one allowed their consciousness to be permeable to an other's (which is what Agatha has done). This attitude, again, reflected the anxiety about the place of the individual within modern society and its threat to autonomy as well. (Thrall 2005:3)

Against her better instincts, yet at least aware that she is disobeying them, Agatha stays at their wishes, once again denying her own. A metaphysical and moral war wages inside of her as she thinks about the "boundless and indestructible compassion"¹⁶ (92), she has directed at him, and how to fear him now, because of that, felt "hateful to her and unholy." (92)

Yet she cannot wrestle him, it is her pity of him, and her degrading of her self, that holds her in his bondage. The "cure" she has effected upon him is false and temporary, because it is dependent on her and not himself. She has allowed this situation, as he has, though it can be argued that she tried to tell him. "I tried to... to work it... so that you might find the secret and do it for yourself," Agatha says. (90)

¹⁶ Here, clearly, is Sinclair's definition of the supernatural force.

And here man, at the beginning of the twentieth century, says a remarkable thing, "I can't do anything for myself." (90) Where did he get this idea? Is it because woman has been raised to carry him, at least in the spiritual and emotional sense, and has been carrying him for a long time, and until she sets him down he will not learn to walk and she will not realize her own weight?

The revelation comes to her in nature, "It was her sanity, not his own, that he walked in." (94) In destroying "those innermost walls of personality that divide and protect, mercifully, one spirit from another," (98) she had let him too close, her walls were not strong enough to keep his insanity out. She had not protected nor respected the borders of either her or his solitude, and he had certainly acted in kind.

She can see that it is his, and is able to understand the power an Other, as well as society, has over an individual to distort their proper perception. This also forces her to see and visit the darkness in her self. She closes and darkens her once open and warmly lit house in much the same way Harding had closed his blinds and remained in the dark not to be seen. It was as if, with no thought for her self, she had become him by concentrating on him.

"It seemed to her that to have a madness of your own would not be so very horrible. It would be, after all, your own. It could not possibly be one half so horrible as

this, to have somebody else's madness put into you," Agatha thinks. (98)

A parallel can be drawn here, to Rilke's discourse on the transition of conventional gender roles. Though we are not examining professional lives in this thesis, we are definitely considering the "distorting influences of the other sex."

The girl and the woman, in their new, their own unfolding, will but in passing be imitators of masculine ways, good and bad, and repeaters of masculine professions. After the uncertainty of such transitions it will become apparent that women were only going through the profusion and the vicissitude of those (often ridiculous) disguises in order to cleanse their own most characteristic nature of the distorting influences of the other sex." [Rilke 2004 (1934, 1904):44]

"...she knew that, whether she were mad or not, there was madness in her. She knew that her face in the glass (she had the courage to look at it) was the face of an insane terror let loose." (97) Now able to see herself as the object she had allowed herself to be, she sees the horror of that position as she releases it. This knowledge, of her self as subject, which Eve was condemned for wanting, is what saves her (and can save Adam, if he lets it). They can walk out of the garden together without blame, that is an option.

"It was in such a luminous flash that she saw the thing still in her own hands, and resolved that it should cease." (99)

When she surrenders, it is not to Harding, nor Rodney, for whom she has offered to give herself up in exchange for, which is oddly what she has already done in her own work, to no avail.

She could not say how it came to her; she was lying in her bed with her eyes shut and her arms held apart from her body, diminishing all contacts, stripping for her long slide into the cleansing darkness, when she found herself recalling some forgotten, yet inalienable knowledge that she had. Something said to her, 'Do you not remember? There is no striving and crying in the world which you would enter. There is no more appeasing where peace *is*. You cannot make your own terms with the high and holy Power. It is not enough to give yourself for Rodney Lanyon, for he is more to you than you are yourself. Besides, any substitution of self for self would be useless, for there is no more self there. That is why the Power cannot work that way. But if it should require you, here on this side the threshold, to give him up, to give up your desire of him, what then? Would you loose your hold on him and let him go?'

'Would you?', the voice insisted.

She heard herself answer from the pure threshold of the darkness: 'I would''

Sleep came on her there; a divine sleep from beyond the threshold; sacred, inviolate sleep.

It was the seal upon the bond. (100)

Harding, gone increasingly mad in the time she has healed herself, has shut himself back into his dark room and Milly implores Agatha to save him. Now able to firmly and kindly say no, and to maintain her intimate boundaries, she admits that she simply *can't*, and that she will *never* try to again now that she knows. Milly cannot understand how she could cut herself off from so great a power. She does not realize it is a cutting off, but rather a turning away, a

sublimation toward a more, worthy and fitting subject; Agatha, her self.

“I haven’t cut myself off from it,’ she tells Milly

“You’ve cut Harding off,’ said Milly, “If you refuse to hold him.”

‘That wouldn’t cut him off– from It. But, Milly, holding was bad; it wasn’t safe.... To you – to them, the people you’re helping. You make a connection; you smash down all the walls so that you – you get through to each other; and supposing there was something wrong with *you*... don’t you see how you might do harm where you were trying to help?... Can anybody be sure there’s nothing wrong with them?’”

“...You were absolutely pure –“ Milly insists, as if Agatha was Mary.

“Who *is* absolutely?... Agatha answers. “if you thought I was, you didn’t know me. (104)

The last two pages of the story are a testimony to Agatha and Rodney’s love for each other. Rodney, told by Milly about Agatha’s work on Harding, shows great concern for Agatha, and does not doubt the possibility of her power. Nor does Rodney doubt the possibility that it had worked on himself. But when Agatha tells him that she also worked on Bella, he doesn’t understand. “Bella was the only way...To keep the thing pure,” Agatha explains. Rodney is unable to argue, “You were right, after all, about Bella...she does care now. (110–111).”

Agatha insists that he see how “it” works, how one has to be pure for it to be powerful. “Obscurely, through the veil of flesh, he saw” (111), writes Sinclair, pointing out the obstacle of the physical in the path of a love beyond desire. She comforts him, and herself, by

saying that he will not need to come back. “You mean you won’t want me?” he asks. (111)

“When I did want you, it broke down.” Agatha says. (111).

But was it not when she was afraid and wanted him to save her? What does it mean to want another person? In Spanish, one wants and loves with the same word. But not in English. It was the desiring of him that broke it down, not the loving. For what does it mean to desire another person? Is it not to possess them? And in allowing this does not one and/or both become “possessed”? Or is it to partake in a carnal celebration of their flesh; to consume them? Is there evolution in that? Or is the desire perhaps connected to something beyond as well as inside of Rodney, to the Absolute he represents, and a communion with the sublime reality behind his appearance?

Rodney “made one last stand against the supernatural thing that was conquering him.” (111) I must admit that I believe it is love we are talking about here, not desire. Love and respect. “I don’t want to shake your faith in it,” (111) he says with his hand on the door. Even though Agatha tells him he can’t, he warns her, “Still – it breaks down.” (111)

Agatha remains convinced that it was the flaw, that was the problem. It was desire. Bella was her proof, she did not desire Bella

and her “cure” was the only one which lasted. But she did not desire Harding, either. Agatha seems to have returned to the idea that she can be flawless. It’s an ideal, for sure, perhaps a necessary one to even get close. Beyond the contradictions, beyond the longing for physical pleasure, there is the spiritual. The following words of Rilke evoke the humility of Agatha:

He can remember that all beauty in animals and plants is a quiet enduring form of love and longing, and he can see animals, as he sees plants, patiently and willingly uniting and increasing and growing, not out of physical delight, not out of physical suffering, but bowing to necessities that are greater than pleasure and pain and more powerful than will and withstanding. [Rilke 2004 (1934,1904):28]

CONCLUSION

Here I must return to the phrase “Love beyond desire”, that Neff so accurately marked as the key to Sinclair’s influence on T.S. Eliot. I link this to the above passage of Rilke’s: the “necessities that are greater than pleasure and pain and more powerful than will and withstanding”. Rilke himself links this to the beauty of love and longing, in other words: the beauty of love and desire. This driving force of desire that the Judeo-Christian world has, for controlling purposes, made ugly and shameful, and therefore, has separated from love – has made unholy what is arguably holiest; human desire. As we have seen, no

matter how it is beaten back, desire does not die.

This “flaw” that desire is, to use Sinclair’s term, when sublimated through love for all subjects, one’s self included as subject, results in both individual and collective transformation. After exploring and considering how purity, symbolized by Mary, is a spiritual state, not a real human being, more aptly symbolized by Eve, life, we have been given a wider view of both man and woman as subjects to and of and from desire. Once both are seen as subjects and allowed adequate room to exist as such, and to embody their full physical and spiritual natures, instead of acting out the roles imposed upon them by society, all human beings become free of that frustrated striving to be what they cannot, and are therefore able to be and honor who they are, regardless of gender. By letting go of those expectations imposed by culture, and the self-blame created when not meeting its standards, man and woman enable each other to *choose* to become who they really are, and to actively, naturally, participate in human evolution.

It is not enough to physically “give” woman the vote, to “give” woman more rights, obviously because this language alone implies that women are still not considered in charge of their own lives; it

seems permission of patriarchal society is required for a female's basic participation in society. Recognizing rights instead of giving them, along involves recognizing woman as a full individual subject. Man and woman are, by nature, equally human. The roles imposed upon them by society are not serving either of them or society spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, and therefore, physically. None of these states are unaffected by the other. A human being senses that truth uncannily, yet it seems to take time to remove it from the depths to which it has reached.

An entirely new way to think about life is required with this paradigm evident in Sinclair's fiction, one that obviously includes the spiritual as part and parcel, as corroborative and supportive, to the physical. If the story of Adam and Eve, and Mary, could be dismantled, the blame and praise along with it, the possibility of an entirely new way of human beings living together would remain. At the dawn of the 20th century, and still today, at the dawn of the 21st, if people are not walking around like automatons fulfilling the patriarchally induced roles within society, they continue to remain on the margin, albeit their numbers are growing. As long as this dualism between physical and spiritual is maintained the human being will continue to be a stranger to his or her self, neurotic and insecure, wondering why life does not feel right.

If so-called “women’s values”—which are often connected to that which is spiritual, intuitive, and psychic (as demonstrated in “The Flaw in the Crystal”)—are recognized in the mainstream as outstanding virtues developed through suffering and sacrifice rather than innate attributes of the female human being, there is the possibility of a more active participation of both sexes in human evolution.

The lack of responsibility connected to desire, as we have seen, results in impossible discourse, neurosis, schism and dependency rather than evolution. When sensuality and sexuality is considered as part of desire rather than all of it, the use of sublimation—this turning toward what is most worthy, not through castigation or repression, but again, through greater desire—is the key to individual evolution that benefits all.

As Rilke wrote

...some day there will be girls and women whose name will no longer signify merely an opposite of the masculine but something in itself, something that makes one think, not of any complement and limit, but only of life and existence; the feminine human being.

This advance will (at first much against the will of the outstripped men) change the love-experience, which is now full of error, will alter it from the ground up, reshape it into a relation that is meant to be of one human being to another, no longer of man to woman. And this more human love (that will fulfill itself, infinitely considerate and gentle, and kind and clear in binding and releasing) will resemble that which we are preparing with struggle and toil, the love that consists in this, that two solitudes protect and border and salute each other." [Rilke 2004:44-45]

Desire. Sublimation. Uncanny. One leads to the other then on to the other and then back again. A wanting to evolve; a desire for worth and beauty that feels strangely like home. A home that is both there and here and up ahead. An uncanny desire for the sublime. Verb + Noun + Adjective; the simplest structure of a question. How to conclude what is eternal? This, I believe, was one of Sinclair's questions.

Will we ever get to the bottom of desire? I venture not, and how boring that would be. It is as much our "flaw" as it is our force. If we apply love to it (which I have subtly argued *is* sublimation), we participate in evolution. Are love and desire not two of the deepest mysteries of life? Can they therefore be anything but sacred?

The study and analysis of love and desire has fascinated this

researcher for decades. Reading Sinclair's words for the first time produced an uncanny feeling in this writer. Her work remains as important and uncanny today as it was a century ago; there is still much to explore and discover within it; *unheimlich* territory that will lead us to strangely familiar understandings.

Nietzsche, Freud, Sinclair, Jung, and Rilke, as well as many before and after were all crusaders in search of the sublime. Through their participation in, and observation of, human evolution, all pointed a way to a more sublime experience on Earth. "Everywhere I go I find a poet has been there before me,"¹⁷ Freud observed, hinting at an inner knowing that writers dare to explore and confirm without scientific proof.

It is as difficult to prove the power of the spiritual dimension in a material world as it is impossible to prove that it cannot be.

As Sinclair, herself, concludes in *In Defence of Idealism*:

¹⁷ "Ils [les écrivains] nous devancent de beaucoup, nous autres hommes ordinaires, notamment en matière de psychologie, parce qu'ils puisent là à des sources que nous n'avons pas encore explorées pour la science" (ref. *Le délire et les rêves dans la Gradiva de W. Jensen*, Paris, Gallimard, 1986, p. 141 – it corresponds to p. 33 of the German edition: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 7, 1941)

“In our present existence we are spirit; but so limited in our experiences that we know the appearances of Spirit far better than we know Spirit itself... There are, after all, different kinds of certainty... No reasoning allows or accounts for these moments. But lovers and poets and painters and musicians and mystics and heroes know them: moments when eternal Beauty is seized traveling through time; moments when things that we have seen all our lives without truly seeing them, the flowers in the garden, the trees in the field, the hawthorn on the hillside, change to us in an instant of time, and show the secret and imperishable life they harbour; moments when the human creature we have known all our life without truly knowing it (*italics are mine*), reveals its incredible godhead; moments of danger that are moments of sure and perfect happiness, because then the adorable Reality gives itself to our very sight and touch. There is no arguing against certainties like these. (D:338)

The uncanniness, or *unheimlichkeit* of being spirit but not recognizing it, the focus on the physicality of one's self, keeps humans separated from their sublime nature and therefore irresponsible of and with it. Once humans make friends, if you will, of their spiritual and physical selves, their desire becomes fuel to drive themselves home (*heim*) in the most sublime sense of the word; a safe place of belonging. In so doing, the world becomes everyone's home, as it was always meant to be, and a new paradigm flourishes. Is that not uncanny?

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