

PAULA M. SALVIO

Uncanny Exposures: 'Working Through' the Lee Miller Archive

I open with the story of Antony Penrose as he begins the work of restoring to public memory the artistry of his mother, Lee Miller, and thus, takes up a position of authority with respect to how her life would be interpreted and remembered. One might well ask what the act of composing an archive offers in terms of preserving the memory of Lee Miller, not only for the public or for her only child, a son, from whom she kept the secrets of war, her public 'teachings,' and the secrets of a personal trauma that altered her entirely, but also for the scholar who is drawn to this archive in the first place. The creation of the Lee Miller Archive serves as a trope for a longing for the past, for the history of the archive is a history of loss that raises important questions about the social and psychic influences that contributed to Miller's silence about her work. Also relevant to our discussion is a study of the depressed maternal position that Andre Green has described as 'the dead mother complex.' What concerns did Lee Miller leave for her son to attend to? What questions persist, impress, haunt? Embedded in this exploration will be an introduction to the concept of the *dead mother* and the urge to repair traumatic psychic wounds through art, writing and love.

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