

PLATH'S AMBIVALENCE IN RELATIONSHIP: LOVE-HATE IN "DADDY"

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ABSTRACT

"Daddy", one of the most concrete examples of confessional poetry, where the author, Sylvia Plath, herself is the speaker and speaks about her dilemma regarding her love and hatred towards the males. By describing her experiences with the males, sometimes in the role of daddy/father and sometimes in the role of the husband, Plath, in "Daddy" shows her constantly changing point of view towards the males. This paper attempts to show Sylvia Plath's ambivalence in her relationships with her father, whom she considered as a Nazi, sometimes as a God, sometimes a vampire or sometimes as a bastard. This paper also shows how Plath compares and considers her husband with the place of father and once again finds her in an ambivalent situation.

Key Words: Love-hatred, psyche, Electra-complex, schizophrenia, bipolar

INTRODUCTION

Sylvia Plath's poem, "Daddy" is a powerful and terrifying description of love and hatred and the psychological paralysis that can ruin a person's life (anonymous). The love-hate-love relationship the speaker feels echoes in this poem is a reflection of Sylvia Plath's inner self and psyche. In an interview Plath once said, "The speaker is a young girl suffering from the Electra complex." This particular relationship between the two is two-fold; that is the Electra Complex found in the speaker of the poem in general is vague and at the same time confusing. It portrays a love-hate relationship by the speaker. "Plath expresses ambivalent feelings towards her father in 'Full Fathom Five' where the poet manifests an Electra Complex regarding her father but lacks of the courage to face him" (Chung 2014: 97). "Daddy" is one of Sylvia's most famous poems and one of the best examples of confessional poetry. Confessional poetry is a style of poetry that became popular in the mid-twentieth century that dealt with personal subject matter that previously had not been openly discussed in American poetry such as private experiences with and feelings about death, trauma, and depression.

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The poem "Daddy" directly addresses to daddy who represents more than just her father but male dominance in general. The tone or attitude of the toward her father and more generally towards male dominance is angry, rather violent. The speaker of the poem "Daddy" compares her subject to a Nazi, a vampire, a devil, a brute, and a resurrected figure in the form of her husband. Apparently, the Nazi references such as 'Ach du'; 'Ich, ich, ich, ich'; panzer man; the mentioning of swastikas; fascists; 'Meinkampf look' shows her anger and implies that her daddy is associated with the tyrannical reign of Hitler. In the other words, she may be angry over the sense of abandonment she felt with her father's death.

Since daddy is already dead, the speaker must kill his spirit that haunts her like a vampire. So she feels she must put a stake through his 'fat, black heart' so that the villagers can dance on his grave in the form of an exorcism. The poem is an expression of her desire to be free of the power and control she feels her dead father has over her.

The poem can also be read as not just about her father but about male dominance over women in general. Plath may have felt this way because her father left her and her mother alone in a very patriarchal time period making it hard to get by without him; or because her husband Ted Hughes had just left her alone with her two children to care for when he left for another woman; or because she felt society in general was not fair to women.

As a matter of fact Plath's father was a fairly normal. He happened to be a loving father before he died when she was eight. So, it is also possible that she felt more oppressed by the loss of him or the memory of him as a fatherless daughter. Thus it seems the relationship with her father that is symbolically portrayed in "Daddy" to be ambivalent in nature – love or a mixture of both.

From the very beginning of the poem it can be seen that the speaker holds grudge, and anger towards her father who left her at a very young age. "The reacts with hate for the father who has made her suffer by dying at such a point in her development" (Aird 1973). To her, she felt that her father as a figure which is larger than life. So, she gave him a Godly figure as a metaphor. Carter said, "Plath uses Godly effigy as a metaphor for the image she has of her father" (Carter 2010). The poet represents her father Poseidon, the Greek God of sea in the poem (Chung 2014: 97). Her father's early death causes Plath to perceive a strong desire for him. For this strong feelings, it seems very difficult for her accept the cruel reality. She fails to admit or accommodate the harsh reality of her father's death. Though death is a part of life and it is a natural process, but the early death of the father is not accepted and

expected by the daughter. As a result she denies her father's death and keeps her alive within her mind. The death of her father left her feeling forsaken and scattered with unsolved issues.

At the age of twenty she tried to take her own life away but she could not. It is clear that she loved her father very much. She tried to commit suicide because it was intolerable for her to live without her father. In the last stanza of the poem, it becomes clear that the speaker desire to reunite with her dead father by committing suicide. The speaker aspires to die for her love's sake. "As a child, she was unable to communicate with him as he recalls with the words, 'I could never talk to you. The tongue stuck in my jaw. It stuck in a barb wire snare'" (Steele)

In general it can be said that this poem is about Sylvia Plath's frustration towards her father. However below the surface of this poem is about hatred towards the aggression and oppression of men. The poet wrote this poem in a manner that indicates anger, resentment, abandonment issues towards her father. The father of the speaker is actually a symbolic representation of all mankind. Her anger is a reflection of hatred and oppressions that women face at the hand of men. "She portrays her situation in a male dominated society and compares her situation to the Jews who under the influence of the Nazis" (Kamelia 2013). The poet used the word 'daddy' which is used by a child not by an adult. She addressed by the word 'daddy' because this indicates the child's love toward its father and at the same time it indicates her father's dominance over her life. She portrays the character of father both as an evil and a divine figure. But to highlight her father's oppression, domination and cruelty, represents him as a 'Nazi'. "The hatred of the daughter merges into the emotional analysis of her recognition, as a Jew, of him as Nazi." (M. Aird 1973). In "Daddy" it might be interpreted that her father (man) causes war and destruction. Men kill each other, leaving daughters alone. Man is here being symbolized as a reflection of destruction where the father being the oppressor. In her matured age, she begins to see her father in a completely new way, "not God but a Swastika" (Plath). Here it represents the relationship between her and her father to that of a Jew and Nazi, and obviously she is the victim and her father is the tormentor.

She goes on to make claims and depicts the resemblance between her father and Hitler. Throughout the poem she calls herself as a Jew even though she was not. She reflects herself in the image of a Jew because she felt anger towards her father. She felt that she was in German camps where she was living in torture. She compares herself to a Jew in the line 34, "talk like a Jew" in this poem. 'Neat mustache', 'Aryan eye' (Plath) these are used to draw parallels between her father and Hitler. "By drawing a parallel between her father and Hitler, she implies that her relationship with her father is an oppressive and a cruel one (Srinivasan 2015).

"She starts out imagining herself as a prisoner living like a foot in the black shoe of her father" (Dickie 1979). This is because according to her feminist view, the male showed the boot that oppressed women to their face, the symbol of their oppression is given by the 'Swastika'. Plath even compares her father with 'Vampire' (Plath). "For years, he has been dead yet still alive, sucking at her blood, draining her of vitae" (Steele). To Plath, her father is a dark, vile creature. This is a hollow representation of a man, including her own father as a dark creature. She points out all the flaws, likens him to Hitler, a dark creature, as a dominative fascist and an oppressive man who has a deeply grasp on her daughter even though he is not alive anymore. But her love is shown when one claims to and take her life, yet somehow, ending up with a man that reminds her at him.

It is clear that the speaker has unsolved issues with her father. That is, she went out and replaced her father by someone who was very much like him and he was her husband, Ted Hughes. Not only Sylvia Plath marries a man who has the resemblance of her father but she tries to bury her love and loss by diverting her anger towards him. Her father was dominating, oppressive and dangerous. She knowing these facts full well still wanted to love her father. This deep love comes from the loss of not having him as her father any more. "She looked for a man as strong as her father, a 'man in black with Meinkampf look who recollects her father's nazi image with love of the rack and the screw' her father's ability to torture her" (Steele). Despite him being compared to a Nazi, a devil, a vampire she still loves her father very much, and it cannot be denied.

PLATH'S INNER WORLD AND PSYCHE

Sylvia Plath, well known for her sensitivity and impassioned reflection upon the inner realm of her psyche, portrays a ruptured personal identity- an identity caught in between the yearning and search for her father Otto Plath and repelling of him to dilute his presence in her world. Her poem "Daddy" constitutes auto-biographical elements to some extent. The dichotomy of a love-hate relationship has been formed considering the emotional challenges Plath has faced as a woman, daughter and wife. Some information (along with contradictory facts) have emerged surrounding Plath's personal life. It appears that her perception of such opposites have arisen in association with her schizophrenic symptoms. Her illusory world where the father is the ideal father collides against her reality in which the father is an autocrat (that Sylvia Plath herself opined regarding her father)- an oppressive tartar who intimidates her. The reality de facto abates the idea of an ideal father until she no longer perceives her father as he is, but imagined in more exaggerated terms where he is but that awful tartar who she cannot tolerate. This is char

acteristic of schizophrenics whereas there is a bridge connected between illusion and reality. However, some other factors suggest she may not have been a schizophrenic but a bipolar. Yet, it is true that whatever the mental affliction must have been, well after Otto Plath died, freedom was released into the home of Plath in northern Massachusetts where she was raised alongside the sea shore. Indeed, he proved to be a man who aroused indelible tension within the parameters of their home.

PRESENCE OF PLATH'S SCHIZOPHRENIA AND ITS EFFECTS ON HER WRITING

Nonetheless, according to scholars Murray M. Schwartz and Christopher Bollas in "The Absence at the Center: Sylvia Plath and Suicide", the matter of schizophrenic symptoms instilled as the distinguishable trait of Plath is stated-

"She seems more and more to exhibit what Kurt Goldstein called the 'concrete attitude' of the schizophrenic for whom the distance between the use of metaphor and the recognition of it 'as' metaphor collapses. Words then become an equivalent of experience rather than mediating or reparative symbols." (Schwartz and Bollas 2015: 152-153)

In consequence of her schizophrenia, reality and the imaginary world unify into one where what she generates into words in her poem become her reality. This may explain why she committed suicide parallel to what she has expressed with somewhat violent imagery in "Daddy"-

"I was ten when they buried you...
I thought even the bones would do."

CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING TED HUGHES IN CONNECTION TO SYLVIA PLATH

Albeit the distinction of the father in the poem has gathered prominence, that of the husband has received comparatively less attention. Only in the following lines do the husband's role come into view:

I made a model of you,
A man in black with a Meinkamf look
And a love of the rack and the screw.
And I said I do, I do.
So daddy, I'm finally through.

However, in real life, Plath's husband Ted Hughes received a tad bit more

attention than he deserved as the controversy-loving media hauled criticism over his involvement in her life holding him as the culprit behind her death. Indeed, by just as much as this poem draws the horrific appeal of the husband with the "Meinkampf look and a love of the rack and the screw" with the Nazi-like unbending cruelty, Hughes's faults of infidelity has been as much criticized and magnified to a colossal degree. Little did she know in her lifetime how her reflection of her husband would be aggravatingly pursued in real life following her death despite his generous attention to publishing her works posthumously in *Ariel*. Writer Erica Wagner has accordingly stated-

"The suicide of his then wife, Sylvia Plath, in 1963 made him not famous but infamous, especially as he struggled to shepherd the work she had left behind into print." (newstatesman.com: 2015)

THE NEXUS BETWEEN THE FATHER AND THE HUSBAND

Nevertheless, the father's role itself is found within the role of the husband. Putting them in the identical spot evokes the presence of the Electra complex within Sylvia Plath. At the same time, the aforementioned lines exude the passivity towards patriarchy. The husband and father are both placed in the negative corner of Plath's life where at least she expected them to be in a wholeheartedly and irrevocably positive corner. On the other hand, in reality, she was cognizant of her father's bee-keeping activity that she connected to Hughes's fondness for nature and animals. When her father died, she expostulated in a type of mourning with a Draconian ferocity and heterodox rebelliousness- "I'll never speak to God again" (neuroticpoets.com: 1997-2017). Notwithstanding, the force of repulsion again wins in the poem by shaping comparison to the Nazis enforcing torture upon the Jews. Hence, she, the "Jew", must hate "every German" that she thought of as her father. Deductively, darkness spoke to her more than light ever did.

FEASIBLE RAPPORT POSSIBLY EXPECTED BY PLATH FROM THE MALE SEX

An ideal father might have been conceived by Plath as a love-nurturing, liberal father. In the universal perspective within modern spectrum, that too is what forms an ideal father in the fast-paced world where women other than men have considerable positions to passionately and professionally ensue. But, a balance must persist whereas liberty is concerned. Excess of exemption of rules to allow exceptional liberal attitude to exist may just be insensible and can distort the well-being of the daughter just as the oppressive nature of the father has the scope to do the same. An ideal husband too stands at the same pedestal whereas love and freedom-abid

ing endeavor are of concern. However, whereas the father has a more distinct authority to set familial rules, the husband too may hold an authoritarian standing but must also compromise to the decisions set by the wife. Creation of boundaries is not necessarily an unfeasible matter. Personal space is a much needed criteria in both the lives of the husband and the wife. A temporal division from the partner entices the individual growth of both the partners. Personal space was indeed attained by Sylvia Plath- Ted Hughes provided this glimmer of opportunity to her to recreate with constant support and even at the wildest of her neurotic outbursts. Whilst the affair of Ted Hughes with AssiaWevill was uncovered in an inapposite time by Plath herself, she channeled her rage against him in making bonfires out of his possessions. He then pointed out how this rage itself needs to be evoked into her writing. Eventually, she does pour her feelings of angst and anguish into it casting a pall of darkness into her works. Her poem "Daddy" itself is a piece to demonstrate that power of monstrous rage and "black" smog that contorted the very idea of equanimity that would have otherwise allayed her. But, this "black" presence whether in the form of a "shoe", "swastika", a "devil" or the "man in black" as a model of the father (with the sinister resemblance to Ted Hughes), did allay her. She was momentarily allayed. She was mystified by the occult- a common interest that she and Hughes shared. After the rift between the two began, the dark force under the influence of her eccentric interest overcame her and overwhelmed all her perceptions. Hughes is, hence, the catalytic source of her muse in "Daddy" even when the father is the central figure in it. It was Ted Hughes who re-invoked her interest in the mysticism- this time of the occult that served as a butt of inspiration for her creativity. Earlier there too was a time when fascination with the preternatural led her away from reality and kept her attention interposed in something magical such as elves and Santa Claus at the tender age of nine until she reached her adolescent period by when she became adjusted to reality. Even where Hughes appears to be the conveyor of demonic furor within her because of his infidelity, she was pulled towards him just as she was pulled towards her father. The father and the husband amalgamate into one person. Ted Hughes remained influential in her life after their separation thus, resting his place within her imagination just as Otto Plath had penetrated into the thick of her wild, fecund mind well after his death within the density of her imagination.

PLATH'S FIGHTING SPIRIT WITH RESPECT TO HER POSSIBLE BIPOLAR CONDITION

Nonetheless, it appears that what she possibly apprehended - that is, creative paralysis- is rather proved to be a fallacy. The mixed feelings of Sylvia Plath and thus the ambivalent portrayal of her god-like father figure confluent with the image of her promiscuous husband produced an indispensable conflict within her

that finally made her draw her last breath too soon. It is surprising to consider why-when writing meant most to her and her writing bloomed the farthest prior to her death- she would intently commit suicide in the most disastrous, self-inflicting way: death by placing her entire head into an oven. In this case, schizophrenia congruent to clinical depression is most liable for her mental aplomb to recede and reach the point of insanity. However, it is also possible that she suffered from a bipolar disorder in lieu of schizophrenia. In her most hyper state in such a condition that is associated with the manic symptoms of bipolar disorder, it is likely that she wrote fluently and prolifically. In the almost opposite extreme of her mental state when her mental vivacity was close to being stultified, she conveyed a fighting spirit through her writing to stave off the feeling of creative paralysis. It can be conceived that whenever Sylvia Plath felt suppressed for one reason or another, she would try to ward off the discomfort by her fighting spirit against creative paralysis. Possibly, when she failed to, her suicidal tendency overpowered her. On the other hand, she wrote incessantly during her lifetime on various subjects that caught her fancy. She wrote several poems in a day that other poets could not even emulate at. Nevertheless, words written offered her the swift chance to relive her experience in a heightened perception and empowered sensitivity. If only the dark force did not take over her, she would not have become estranged from her state of well-being. Yet, this dark force with almost a supernatural voraciousness inciting a deeper space of darkness contributed by her contorted perception of Hughes, her father and the patriarchal world are what imparted the sensation of her identity as a writer in the literary realm. That may explain why the father in "Daddy" is an alluring as well as a repelling force in her life.

THE DICHOTOMY OF THE LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP TOWARDS THE FATHER

The father-daughter relationship of Sylvia Plath is rather a conception clouded by a mist whereas love and contempt both dwell side by side. In reality, one source asserts that Plath's father was not attentive to her needs and another source claims that he was a repressive man with a pro-German attitude. Upon what has come to light in *The Guardian*, FBI files have been uncovered information in relation to Otto Plath. This may clarify the cause of troubles brewing in Plath's affinity to her father. However, contradictory facts have resulted to confusion regarding his national identity. The FBI has recorded that Otto lost teaching positions for being an "alien enemy" (theguardian.com: 2012). They also noted in one case that "he will return to Germany after the War, and seems to have assumed a rather pro-German attitude towards (it) on account of losing his positions". However, on another account, it is stated that he had "a rather indifferent attitude" and denied of going back to Germany after the War. Nevertheless, "Plath" is Otto's ancestral German name which attaches his identity to German nationality. And yet, Sylvia endeared

her father inexorably. When she was informed of her father's death when she was merely eight years old, she declared "I'll never speak to God again." Besides her devotion to him, it also suggests how she substitutes God for her father- "a bag full of God" as found in "Daddy". Yet again, even though she loved him, David Holbrook's "insight" suggests what Plath may have faced as restated by Schwartz and Bollas in "The Absence at the Center: Sylvia Plath and Suicide" - "an incapacity to love was at the heart of Plath's experience... as a consequence of Plath's failure to integrate her inner world sufficiently to make a coherent sense of personal identity possible." (Schwartz and Bollas 2015: 148-149)

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER BEING A PATRIARCHAL FIGURE

It appears that her repulsion triumphed over her love for her father. But, this sense of repulsion may not be singularly targeted at the father, but at the whole of patriarchy. As per the father-daughter relationship, there lies "an allegorical representation of her fears of creative paralysis" withholding the idea that the father stands for patriarchy and daughter for all womankind. This is likely to be true as being thought to have become deprived of using her creative impulse may have resulted to her possible suicide that has been aforementioned. Her first attempt at suicide pervaded after she was rejected creative writing courses at Harvard University followed by her period of extreme depression. Such a rejection dissolves or at least, diminishes her sense of self-worth. So, if the societal pressure of patriarchy is responsible for her death, it is responsible for the making of "Daddy" some time prior to her death. As it is said, Plath's reality and her own imaginative perception of reality barely comprise any gap between them-

At twenty I tried to die
And get back, back, back to you.
I thought even the bones would do.

Parvin Ghasemi too addresses the same issue. She writes in "Reflections of Self and Other in Sylvia Plath's 'Mirror' Imagery" in approval of Freedman's belief reflecting "female passivity, subjection and Plath's own conflicted self-identity caused by social pressures" (Ghasemi 2007: 58). The overpowering provisos of patriarchal society conjured a side to Plath that was forced down upon her, thus, instigating oblivion to her "self-identity". Though in the tender, adolescent period of her life, she lived without the guidance of her father; the strain of parochial idealization hounded her as though her deceased father were still alive as illumined in "Daddy". It can be assumed by the photos of Sylvia Plath that she had a remarkable beauty (though this may be of subjective opinion)- a beauty to be nurtured and a beauty that died too soon upon her and within her inner self when devoured by her

inner conflict. The society surrounded her may have expected her to always remain polished, young and beautiful extensively. She, on the other hand, could not maintain such a picture of herself whilst she was on pursuit of something greater- her spiritual self. Finally, in "Daddy", when she is "through", the strain is thus weakened by the now overpowering voice of the female speaker. She has willfully and determinedly chosen reign over her own mind and body over self-annihilation or self-abatement. Ironically, only in real life, does she contradict this idea. By contradicting this idea, she has contradicted her most vital credence- life: life that was molded under her writing finger-tips and that ultimately defined her.

CONCLUSION

"Daddy" is an exceptional portrayal of a daughter's relationship with her father, a relationship full of love and hatred. This ambivalent relation often makes the audience consider the relation from various angles. Here, daughter is Sylvia Plath herself who expresses her feelings towards her father through some dreadful, fearful words which indicate how annoyed she was by her father. And at the same time, Plath expresses her love to her father and her expression of love is parallel to her hatred towards her father. The parallel expression keeps the reader having a confused perception regarding the daughter-father relation. She has kept this ambivalent relation between her and her father which reflects how Plath felt about her father.

Finally it can be said that Plath often writes with detachment, observing her subjects coolly. She writes convincingly about female experiences, but she does not adopt a personal tone. As far as her concerns about male subjects, here she writes in such a way as to allow the reader to empathize, but from a safe distance. Her female speaker here addresses us directly, intimately, drawing us into her world. We might feel we are being confided in by this woman who shares their pain with us openly. Plath's use of the I-speaker can make her poetry seem confessional and conversational. Placing the female speaker at the centre of so many of her poems enables Sylvia Plath to insist on the validity and significance of women's experiences.

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