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A Deconstructive View of Sylvia Plath's Poetry

Many critics believe that Sylvia Plath's productions in general and her poetry in particular are mere reflections of her personal and private life, which by she finds a comfortable medium to transmit her agonies and despair. Therefore, in order to deepen our understanding of her poetry, some critics assert, we need to equip ourselves with some biographical sketches of her life, for biographical criticism assumes a strong bond between the artist and her/his literary offspring. "Every author", says J.W. Von Goethe, "in some way portrays himself in his works" (Gillespie 20); each single poem of her/his creation mirrors a certain incident or personal affair. Thus it would be easier for us to reach conclusions if we understood the writer's world before delving into her/his works. But if we really confine ourselves to the authors' lives and experiences, the text's door of explanations and interpretations will be closed, narrowing itself into a closed window of one conclusion opened only by the author.

The question here is do we really need to wear our investigation glasses and begin to dig deep down in the artist's diaries and personal clothes to gain working knowledge and evidences that would help us to condemn a work of art? Or no longer the text, who always exists in the present time, is the obedient and submissive child who obeys his father's rules and law, instead it becomes the bad boy who leaves home since the day he is born to seek his path alone without the handcuffs of his deceased past father. Issac Bashevis Singer states that "If people are really hungry, they do not care about the biography of the baker" (Gillespie 20). This chapter is starving and because of its unquenchable hunger, it is not able to differentiate between the cake and its baker, thus both plates might make the text's mouth water.

Sylvia Plath's ingenious mind and her society were not on good terms at all. She could not adjust herself to her surroundings, nor could she find a diplomatic method to wear a mask that hides beneath it her contempt and anger of the societal and utterly male-dominant community that imposed on woman conventions and limitations that were not tolerated by her, and thus ended up dead by her own hands. A close examination by many critics of her poetry, especially the poetry before her suicide, categorizes Plath under poets of the 'confessional mode', which is a modern branch of poetry that deals with the personal affairs and private sentiments of the writer who resorts to such kind of poetry to convey and manifest exclusively her/his own images of despair, pain, anguish and ugliness of life and her/his inflaming desire for death (Anjum 1). Indeed, the confessional movement, led by Robert Lowell, defined and characterized by the critic "M. L. Rosenthal as autobiographical, therapeutic ('soul's therapy' and 'self-therapeutic') and unflinchingly truthful (featuring 'uncompromising honesty')" (Gill 20), had a great influence on Plath's writings as she obviously declared in an interview with Peter Orr:

I've been very excited by what I feel is the new breakthrough that came
 With, say, Robert Lowell's *Life Studies*, this intense breakthrough into
 Very serious, very personal, emotional experience which I feel has been
 Partly taboo . . . (Orr and et al).

Not only was she classified as a confessional poetess "pursuing sensation to that ultimate, exciting uncertainty, death" (Lane ix), which was the only way out of this gross and unendurable physical world. "But the list projected Plaths might go on for pages" (Lane ix). For sure, a full mixed bag of different names and novel adjectives has been dedicated to her such as: "A confessional poet, an extremist poet, a post-romantic poet, a pre-feminist poet, a suicidal poet" (Bassnett 117). Without any shadow of doubt, Sylvia Plath's intricate and sophisticated personality and her works as well, could never be limited or explicated by some glib terms uttered out of lack of freedom or loyalty to the archaic traditions and conventions. Nonetheless, this chapter publically discloses the clear-cut detachment of the father from its supposed children who announce their disobedience to the supposed and intended intention of their maker.

Perhaps 'Daddy' is one of the most apparently autobiographical and popular piece of work written by Plath, "and perhaps for that reason, it occasionally takes the shared resonance of private references too much for granted" (Breslin). Indeed, 'Daddy' "is a terrible poem, full of blackness, and one of the most nakedly confessional poems ever written." (Phillips). Hence, this 'confessional' poem is the best example to be examined in the light of deconstruction. Reading 'Daddy' from an autobiographical perspective, we will find the incredible capacity of Sylvia of making her poem a strong bridge upon which her "visceral emotions" cross to reach the heart of the reader (Cote-Massicotte 57). But to interpret the poem thus is not merely "to use biography as a way of understanding context, but to use it as a counter-text, correcting that of the poem" (Breslin).

Sylvia manages to gain the sympathy and compassion of her audience by Portraying a "vulnerable young girl" who has been victimized by her dominant phallic figures (Cote-Massicotte 57). The first important character is supposedly her deceased father who died 1940 of advanced diabetes, when Sylvia was only 8 years old. With her father's death, she lost the affection and Godly love a father could provide for a daughter; "Her father, 'full of God,' died, removing" the spiritual sense of paternity. If such magnificent element of life (father's love) was absent, what else could be present? (Lane 3). The moment we read the poem, we will notice a childish, submissive voice of an innocent girl who tries to convey the message of the author (Cote-Massicotte 57). But things twist themselves and deviate from the authorial and confessional track the poem supposed to walk upon; since we have a young girl speaks in the behalf of an adult, nothing would be accurate as it is. Hence the poem full of contradictions and instability pervades throughout the poem.

The young girl is presented to convey hatred and virulence that a reader can observe from first reading. In a way to get rid of her ghost-haunting father, Sylvia tries to explicate the "thirty years" she spent controlled by her acute indignant feelings toward her daddy, describing the huge difference between her size and his: she is a little tiny thing who fits to be a mouse in the huge "black shoe" of her father. He can stamp on her without being aware of her presence and this suggests her submissiveness and secondary level. She is an innocent little "white" girl who supposedly has to have fun and be the most cheerful girl in the world with the presence of her father. Yet, she dares not to

breathe; her daddy's presence and absent are suffocating her. The speaker resembles her father to gigantic statue, referring to his dominant influence over her. He is a Nazi and she is Jew, and his absent-presence is the holocaust she is going through. He is a vampire and she is the blood-sucked victim who lived in agony and pain throughout her life. As we notice she is the victim of her patriarchal dominant society where she suffered from humiliation and ignominy of being a young little girl whose only sin is that she wants to talk and play with her father as normally as possible.

Reading the poem for the second time, you will notice that the alleged anger hide beneath it a deep, sincere love and even idealization. The first problem is with the title: "Daddy" is supposed to be a terrible poem, full of anger and hatred, yet the title contradicts the content and denotes an intimate relationship between the girl and her father (Huang 2). Even when she describes him as "Marble-heavy," "Ghastly statue" and "Big as a Frisco seal"; like a statue that stretches across the United States, he is everywhere she goes; he is ubiquitous and omnipotent like a God. She explicates her fascination with her father's great figure who is associated with marble which is a smooth, luxurious stone used to build mansions, he is an idol or even a god who worth to be prayed for. She describes her father as "black shoe," and herself as a "poor and white" girl who lived in that shoe for "thirty years" which indicates a strong relationship between the two; she depends on him for surviving. Even when she has "had to kill" her father, she refers to the fact that the image of her father does not detach her mind because she subconsciously adores him and wants to be with him no matter how, even if she has to kill herself and to kill the image of her father, yet she will unite with her father's soul.

He is a "Nazi" and she is "a bit of Jew" (Plath 40). As contrast to her father's "Luftwaffe" and "gobbledygoo", which represents the German strictness and cruelty in her father? Yet, the German/Jew relationship is no more associated with negative terms; her father's identity is bound by her existence. At the end she is consent with the tyrant/victim relationship and even strengthens it by her joining the two words together: "Jew" and "you" (Huang 3). "Every woman adores a Fascist" is a crystal-clear evidence of her affection and love for her daddy. Even though she uses dreadful wording to

describe him, yet between the words a great love and respect are there, and that is why her crave end is to die in order to meet her father.

Furthermore, because of her great connectedness and fondness of her father, she tries to kill herself "At twenty" to live side by side with her father's soul. But, when her soul is kept inside her body and prevented it running away from her, by others, to meet with her daddy, she tried to immortalize the image of her father, spiritually and physically, by making "a model of" him the man who shares with her father the "black" color and who has a "Meinkampf look" (Plath 65). Yet this man whom she marries to keep her father's image turns into a fiendish "vampire" who pretends to be her father and she is an innocent prey which he day and night feeds on her blood. Yet, she is satisfied with this and even happy, because no one in the world stays "Seven years" loyal to a "vampire" man. If she was not happy with these seven years she would not stay that long time suffering from torture.

A clear consensus is between the title and the form of the poem; that is the title sounds somehow a childish, affectionate word used by a little young girl to call her father, the structure of the poem as well is made up of basically "nursery rhyme," "light verse" and of what "Robert Pack calls repetition" which is "'an act of love for the word repeated,'" (Lane 60). Indeed, the compulsive repetition of the sound /u:/ in the poem is striking and it immediately draws us back to the word you that end with the same sound /u:/, and this widespread use of the rhyme is an evidence of her great love for her father (Platzky). Another important repetition that permeate in the poem is the occurrence of the pronoun you almost "28 times" and this suggests her father's devilish domination of her while the repetition of the "self-referential" pronouns 'I,' 'my,' and 'me' that occur about "34 times" in the poem indicates her resolved attitude to gain her independency of the patriarchal despotic chains (Platzky). The use of nursery rhyme and light verse suggests the innocence of the speaker whose heart is pure and simple who knows not words such as hatred and contempt.

The idealization of the father figure presented at the opening stanzas of the poem indicates the little girl attachment to her father and her overwhelming desire to meet with him. Nevertheless, as the poem proceeds, the young girl transforms into an adult woman

who tries to make up for her loss by marrying a man who "said he" is her father, yet he turns into a demon who is very different from the idol of her father. Hence, her father and her husband are completely different and should be viewed differently.

"In the poem, the poet uses three metaphors - - - the colossus, the Nazi, and the vampire - - - to express the speaker's ambivalent feelings toward her daddy and the mixture of the three creates a figure of both deity and demon." (Liang 18)

Indeed, the inconsistency of her feelings in the poem creates a complex paradox embedded in the speaker's psyche, which leads in the end to the ultimate paradox; death accompanies life.

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