

A PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF TRAUMAS AND INTRICATE RELATIONSHIPS IN SILVIA PLATH'S *DADDY*

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Abstract

This paper discusses Sylvia Plath's poem Daddy psychoanalytically, stressing unsettled grief, repressed feelings, and the complex relationship between father and daughter. By engaging theories of unconscious mind, repression, and the Electra complex of Sigmund Freud, this study investigates how Plath's personal trauma and mental conflicts are reflected in her clear imagery and aggressive language. The analysis explains the interchange between loss, emotional captivity, and the speaker's struggle for freedom from patrimonial dominance. By revealing suppressed feelings and emphasizing the complications of grief, this research provides a subtle comprehension of Plath's psychological condition and her thirst for self-determination.

Keywords: Sylvia Plath, Daddy, unresolved trauma, father complex, mourning and loss

Introduction

Sylvia Plath (1932-1963) is perhaps the best known American woman poet of the twentieth century. Her poems and fiction, especially her 1963 novel *The Bell Jar*, are widely taught in high schools and universities across the English-speaking world, while her *Journals* and *Letters* constitute one of the most important *Künstlerromane* of a woman writer in any era. Her name is regularly invoked in popular culture, often as shorthand for feminism, confessionalism, or depression, and sometimes all three (Clark, 2021). Plath may ultimately be remembered, not only for her poetry, and her role in the history of feminism, where she was more a tool and a victim than a protagonist, but for her pioneering exploration of the phenomenology of life and loss before birth (Owen, 2008).

Her poem *Daddy* is written in a powerful nursery rhyme rhythm that characterizes several of the later poems. (Bassnett, 1987). Sylvia Plath's *Daddy* remains one of the most provocative and enduring poems of the 20th century, capturing the profound interplay between personal grief and artistic expression. Written in 1962, shortly before her untimely death, the poem exemplifies Plath's confessional style, where the boundaries between the poet's life and her work blur. *Daddy* is more than an autobiographical lament. It is a journey into the complex psychological ground of pain, trauma, and the cost of achieving freedom from the ghosts of old. The poem has a petrol imagery and at times shocking, it takes the coldness of Plath's facing honesty to such a alive place. The central event of the poem is Plath's intimate relationship with her father Otto Plath. It was to never recover from the loss of father killed when Sylvia was just an eight year old, she privileges it and regrets it in the

poetry. This is a father, but it is not just a personal memory. In *Daddy*, this is the sign of the patriarch, authority, repression and unhealed wound. With a seemingly simple language, Plath tells a story that outgrows its autobiographical background and touches hearts and minds of those exposed with love, loss and nostalgia. *Daddy* is a full voice about the past A method to face head on and unveil the lasting fatherhood and absence. Sylvia Plath's poem *Daddy* is a compelling investigation of trans-generational trauma and the convoluted relationship that molds an identity, by looking through Sigmund Freud's psychological theory, as well as Sigmund Freud is most famous figure in psychoanalysis is also one of the greatest and most controversial thinkers of the last century. Sigmund Freud an Austrian born in 1856, is commonly known as the "father" of contemporary psychology. A product of the disturbed time in Plath's life, the poem captures the essential influence her father had on her setting into emotional avalanche born of unconscious psychological conflicts. This evaluation will explore the unacknowledged trauma, repression and fathers-hood discourse that enact Plath as a writer resounding the true chaos of human emotions and fight for liberation.

Sigmund Freud's theory of The Unconscious Mind is a psychoanalytic theory discussing that human mind is made up of conscious and unconscious behaviors. The unconscious mind is composed of feelings, thoughts, memories and desires that are unreachable to conscious mind which is able to influence our emotions, behavior and inspirations. In writer's poem *Daddy* the unconscious mind is portrayed through deep emotions of hatred and anger which she shows towards her father. Nonetheless, under this evident surface, there is an unsettled deep layer of desire, grief which reflects the unconscious mind.

Background of the Study

Sylvia Plath *Daddy* is a powerful emotional poem about the private agony of quite a lot, specifically what she feels toward her father. Themes of grief, anger and unresolved pain stuck with readers the most in this poem. This study aims to comprehend the underpinning feelings and tension in the poem using Freud's psychoanalytic theory as a base to investigate the hidden. Breakdown of what Plath went through allows us to better comprehend how trauma manifests in artistic production.

Literature Review

According to Schwartz .S , our psychological journey is expressed through poetry , simulating various scenarios, psychology and literature together pave the way of development and reflecting our common dramas and emotions. What is called a "dead father affect" on a daughter is amazingly described by American poetess , Sylvia Plath (1932-1963) , her life ,her pieces of writings . There seems to be various problems whether it is personal or collective, when the father is absent emotionally or physically. She remains mentally handcuffed to the dead connection. An emotional contract is made with the absence of father, not available for catharsis as the dead father is interiorise and numbs her system.

Shulman (1998) discussed Plath's issues ,her father's demise ,her living outside the United States, her stress from overburden ,her country . According to him, Plath's husband was savage sometimes, and they got separated more than one time . When Plath was teaching at Smith college, she was liked by her students but not by her colleagues . According to Shulman , Plath had medical problems (illness, appendicitis) , and seemingly she had mix emotions about her mother.

Beg ,M (2004) explained that Plath has irreversibly gained the cult position in the records of modern American English poetry . Plath has proved to be unflagging poetess who discussed her own feelings , turmoils , life events , her relationship with her father , mother ,

husband, children generally and in particular shed light on society in a buoyant manner. Her amazing and striking writings include *The Colossus* (1960), *Ariel* (1963), *Crossing the Water* (1971), *Winter Trees* (1971). She left this world by committing suicide at a very young age of thirty one but her poetry still captivates the reader constantly and irresistibly. However, her poetry is subjective and is an expression of her mental trauma. Plath's poetry is a reflection of her personal struggles, mental illness, distanced relationship with her husband, her unsettled relationship with her parents and her own shadowy and sad vision. Most of her poetry discusses nature of pain and tribulations, its shades, effect on human soul, its conclusion leading towards death. She kept writing with her pen soaked in blood of her damaged soul, which can be evidently seen in her writings.

Bassnett, S. (1987) told about a reading for BBC radio of *Daddy* by Sylvia Plath explains:

"Here is a poem spoken by a girl with an Electra complex. Her father died while she thought he was God. Her case is complicated by that fact that her father was also a Nazi and her mother very possibly part Jewish. In the daughter the two strains marry and paralyse each other - she has to act out the awful little allegory once over before she is free of it."

Saha (2022) explained the complicated relationship of Das and her father which she discussed in her poem "A Requiem for Father". Das remembers her father after his demise. A Requiem is a song of mourning or loss which is written or performed as a tribute to a dead person. In this song of mourning, Das expresses mixed emotions about her father. When her father was alive, she felt diminutive in front of his colossal stature which downgraded almost everything around him to zilch. She was so malleable in his lifetime that even after his passing away his very demeaning condition at the time of death seems to be very in appropriate to the prestige of the man:

"We tried so hard to hide your waist.
And, the catheter, hanging,
when once the stampede, tugged off the intravenous tube
we got the young intern to come in a hurry.
To hack at your swollen feet and find yet another
vein to pierce, of we tried so hard to keep the prying out.
But They kept coming in droves to watch the strong man die"
(6-12)

The man who first was the owner of a prestigious stature as the first Indian managing director of a British Luxury car company or later as the managing editor of *Mathrubhumi*, one of Kerala's highest circulation Malayalam dailies, suffered in his last days. Das remembers how she felt at that time, "we were tongue-tied, humbled and quiet/Although within we wept for you/And more for ourselves, now without a guardian" ("A Requiem for Father" 21-23). When her father passed away she was not really a minor who needed care, however, she still feels that she has become someone "without guardian" and this emotion is developed from the same practice of considering a father as the earning male member, the only fount of authority and protection.

Statement of the Problem

This study analyzes Sylvia Plath's *Daddy* through Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory to investigate the Psychological struggles and feelings involved in the poem. Examines the relationship between Plath and her father that affects her writing, as well as what is it like working in the shadow of unresolved trauma.

Objectives of the Study

1. To probe the usage and purpose of confrontational language in *Daddy* and its role in emotional salvation
2. On unmasking repression connected to father complex
3. To investigate the speaker finding her way out of her fathers emotional shadow
4. To examine the portrayal of Electra complex and linked repression.

Aim of the Study

This research sought to investigate the number of layers in Sylvia Plath's *Daddy*: as embodiments of unchanged trauma and failed liberation, these seem to be the core of the anxiety-wound speaker traverses. In investigation the unmasking of repression and the obdurate father role, the aim was to unveil the psychological contending that have moulded the speaker. The last part of the article also discussed how loss and the Electra complex connected, as these findings had larger socius meanings in regards to familial relationships. The following analysis shed a greater light to the extent that Plath was investigating trauma and what it destroys on a personal level.

Scope of the Study

Sylvia Plath's *Daddy* as a psychological analysis from the psychoanalytic perspective of Sigmund Freud. This paper explores its darker, psychological side and looks specifically at the poem in terms of repression emotionally and Electra complex. Why the confrontational language and emotional turmoil of the speaker mark a close between the patriarch and his daughter, is what this study addresses. An investigation that will go some way towards detailed insights about the psychological impact of Plath in general and also, how literature depict inner conflicts, psychological processes.

Hypothesis

The idea behind this study is that Sylvia Plath's poem *Daddy* uses confrontational language and images to show the separation of the psyche from the emotionally free self, which could be a cathartic battle. It seems that these are connected to the unconscious mind, repression and Electra complex in the poem; the speaker is struggling with his or her father's memory and is trying to face it and share it. The study also assumes that the poem itself is a metaphor for getting away from the depression-like fog that surrounds our father figure.

Research Questions

- How does Plath's use of confrontational language in *Daddy* reflect her struggle for emotional liberation from her father's memory?
- In what ways does the poem reveal the process of unmasking repression related to the father complex?
- How does the speaker navigate the process of breaking free from the emotional shadows cast by her father's loss?
- How does *Daddy* show the dynamics of the Electra complex and the repression related with the father figure?

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it looks at how Sylvia Plath's *Daddy* shows huge emotional and mental problems. It tries to figure out what the poem is trying to hide about buried feelings and the speaker's confusing relationship with her father by using Freud to explain the ideas behind his work. This research helps us see how literature can express and

make sense of inner conflicts, providing a fresh perspective for readers, students, and scholars. It not only deepens our understanding of Plath's work but also highlights the power of poetry in connecting personal pain to universal human experiences.

Research Methodology

This research exists a psychoanalytic approach to analyze the Sylvia Plath's poem *Daddy*. In this research, I used the qualitative methodology to analyze the Plath's emotional and psychological state with the help of Sigmund Freud's theories of trauma, repression, mourning, the Electra complex and melancholia. This psychoanalysis allowed for penetrating insight of Plath's psychological condition. This qualitative approach helped me create a fuller understanding of how experiences and psychological worlds attended by the poetry of Sylvia Plath. Freudian method of psychoanalysis may help a more detailed analysis on how these unconscious works were moulded into the speakers emotional outputs and poetically.

Sampling

In this study, used a purposive sampling methodology to sample Sylvia Plath's *Daddy*. This text was selected because of thick thematic material connected to trauma and psycho-biography analyses are tailored to themes ranging from madness to violence. The poem *Daddy* was selected as it directly addresses paternal issues, loss and repression (central motifs in Freud's writings). The selected text was studied with the assistance of analyzing close reading, so as to be as in-depth into a language, image and symbol wise. It is through these works that the research intends to expose the ways in which unconscious forces are inextricable from the emotional responses and ultimately poetic expression of this speaker, informing not only what we know about Plath's psychological states, but also the broader application of psychoanalytic literary criticism.

Data Collection Procedure

For a psychoanalytic analysis of Sylvia Plath *Daddy*, this research used a systematic data collection to determine the needed texts and contextual information. Plath's primary texts were first procured from standard editions of her work, specifically focusing on the poem *Daddy* for text alignment like this specific title. This text was chosen for the thematic connection into trauma and the psychological dilemmas Plath wrestles with in her writing. The poems came from literary collection of print and digital libraries in order that the texts of record could be used in the analysis.

Having retrieved these texts, a close reading of the poem was carried out to identify important themes, symbols and emotional nuances. This process entailed multiple readings of Plath's poem in order to parse out any motifs repeating and significant vocabulary that necessarily connected to the psychological state of Plath at the time. Further, source secondary critical essays and psychoanalytic literature were consulted for further support and background to the analysis. These sources formed a theoretical basis for interpreting Plath through the conversation of Freud as he theorized trauma, repression, and Electra. The combination of primary text analysis and secondary literature review ensured a comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationship between Plath's poetry and her psychological experiences.

Delimitation of the study

This study focuses on the poetry from Sylvia Plath's *Daddy* (1965). The main target is about the trauma and loss of parental experience, bringing psychological implications, as well developmental difficulties of identity work; all other themes like feminism and existentialism

are excluded on purpose so as to have a concentrated analysis other grounds can be found. The research is qualitative in method, meant for close reading and thematic analysis and not quantitative to allow a thorough examination of the texts.

Data Analysis

In this analysis I look at a few of the complex themes in Sylvia Plath poetry, calling attention both to pervasive trauma and to the process of liberation. Uncovering repression and the father complex is a step toward understanding how Plath's psyche was woven into her output. Also, the critique will look at the speaker found liberating herself from the shadows of loss all the sustenance that comes from hurting emotionally. The interplay of the Electra complex and the father's repression serves to further illuminate those deep conflicts bubbling underneath Plath. Here, I hope best elude Plath's poetic labyrinth and the numerous layers of meaning that gave shape to her search for self once more.

Unresolved Trauma and the Struggle for Liberation

Plath's poem *Daddy* realistically shows Plath's emotional response towards her father's death along with hostile imagery and confrontational language. The poem begins with the lines:

You do not do, you do not do
Any more, black shoe
In which I have lived like a foot (lines 1-3).

This metaphor presents the father as a tyrannical figure depicting that his memory has been confining and choking for Plath. Freud's theory of psychoanalysis says that unresolved trauma is evident through symbolic representations and in *Daddy* it is clear that Plath channels her unsettled trauma often through harsh imagery. The father seems to be portrayed as "Colossus" and is compared with a "Nazi" (lines 11,22) revealing her emotional encounters.

In addition, the theme of authority and control is also being explored in this poem. Plath used sharp and disturbing metaphors to portray her father as an oppressive figure. For example, she writes:

I was ten when they buried you.
At twenty I tried to die
And get back, back,
back to you (lines 45-47)

Plath's feeling of desertion and emotional suffering is expressed through these lines. The reference to attempted suicide can be seen as an example of strong impact of her father's memory upon her, which leads her to psychological grief and ensnare.

In the closure of the poem, where Plath announces

Daddy, Daddy, you bastard, I'm through (line 56)

This line highlights a moment of freedom and determination. By stating that she is "through" her father, Plath portrays a wish to be free from persisting emotional entrapment from the memory of her father. This final announcement can be seen as an attempt to claim back her own identity and self-determination, separate from the domineering presence of her father.

Unmasking Repression and the Father Complex

Plath's *Daddy* is a strong depiction of subconscious ideas and suppressed emotions as it explores the unclear and ongoing trauma of speaker's father's death. Freud's theory of repression which deals with shoving the aching emotions into the subconscious, is profoundly portrayed in this poem. There seems to be push-pull mechanism of subdued emotions present in the poem as the speaker both glamorize and hate her father. The imagery of the "black shoe" in which speaker has "lived like a foot" (line 2) for thirty years indicate the choking effect of suppression where her unsettled trauma has become an emotional burden.

The unconscious ideas in the poem also whirl around domination and power specially how speaker unknowingly views her father as a domination figure. Giving her father the title of Nazi and herself Jew suggest a metaphor which creates a rhetorical depiction of suppression, and exasperation and anxiety she feels towards her father. The line:

Every woman adores a Fascist (line 48)

This line presents the speaker's unintended attraction to superior male figures depicting that the death of her father left an unsettled wish for affection, love, domination intermixed with indignation. This suffering is deeply embedded in her mind.

Freud's theory of repression can be observed in the poem *Daddy* as speaker harbors suppressed emotions towards her father in figurative and excessive ways. The climax of the poem where speaker announces:

Daddy, Daddy, you bastard, I'm through (line 80)

This line indicating a psychological development. This brutal abdication of her father represents an attempt to chop off his domination over her subconscious mind for years. In resisting her suppressed emotions speaker tries to break free from the psychological chains of her father's memory, though it does not seem completely victorious.

Breaking Free from the Shadows of Loss

The central theme of the poem *Daddy* is the speaker's process of mourning over her father's death, as she resists deep rooted emotional scars caused by his omission in her life. An amalgamation of anguish and trauma is expressed by the speaker instead of glamorizing him, which depicts the complication of lamentation process. The line, "I was ten when they buried you" indicates how her trauma has been a long lasting burden for her. This lamentation is not only for the unvarnished loss of her father but also for the psychological damage of her personality as his death has formed her self-image.

The speaker compares herself to a prisoner in "barb snare wire" as she depicts herself as a victim of her father's reminiscence. This metaphor suggests the entanglement of suffering, in which the reminiscence of the departed becomes a repressive force. In this poem, how the speaker tries to rise above the shadow of her father, obsessed with the lost soul, leads us towards Freud's theory of melancholia, where the sufferer remains fixated on a lost object. She accepts saying "I used to pray to recover you" indicating her useless and frantic attempts to revive his father's existence, even as it frightens her.

Finally, the speaker's announcement, "So daddy, I'm finally through" highlights a turning point in her lamentation citation. It indicates her psychological retrieval, as she repudiates her emotional dependence on her father. This moment of liberation is not calm, but signifies anguish and resistance. However, it is a mandatory step for the speaker to start recovering as she sets herself free from past's chains of emotions on her personality.

Electra Complex and Repression of Father Figure

In the poem *Daddy*, with the help of psychoanalytic theory we can observe how Plath uses her father both as a figure of glamorization as well as of terror and suppression. The way Plath is fixated on her father's supremacy in the poem suggest the presence of Electra complex here, in which a daughter has unconscious rivalry with her mother to gain her father's attention and affection. The reiteration of

You do not do
You do not do

Suggest that the speaker is unable to part from the image of her father who rules over her psychic landscape even in death.

In addition, the poem's shocking conclusion in which Plath announces:

They are dancing and stamping on you.
They always knew it was you.
Daddy, daddy you bastard , I'm through

This line indicates not only an emotional release but also the complicated feelings attached to suppression and unsettled trauma. Freud's notion on the death drive and reiteration can be observed in the poem as the speaker of the poem repeat the grieving memory of her father in various forms , eventually gaining psychological liberation by opposing his supremacy.

Inferences

The research examines the complexities inherent in Sylvia Plath's *Daddy*, specifically the conflict between repression and emotional release. The speaker's forceful position and vivid imagery suggest a fierce struggle against the repression of paternal memories. The poem has evident psychological conflicts, including Electra complexes, as the speaker struggles to express his repressed emotions. These findings highlight Plath's profound capacity to transform personal suffering into universal insights about psychology and emotional catharsis. Rejected children exhibit aggression and emotional unresponsiveness, highlighting the impact of perceived rejection on their development (Sarfaraz et al., 2024).

Further Recommendations for Future Research

Here, I examine Sylvia Plath's *Daddy* with the help of psychological models that shed light on repression, emotional liberation and complex relationship with father. Additionally, more research could build on these ideas to provide a more in-depth look at how similar themes appear in Plath's other works, which would provide a more accurate picture of her mental illness. There may be more useful literary works that deal with family conflict than *Daddy*. Comparative studies between the two might be successful. Additionally, combining different fields of study, like psychological theory with feminism or cultural analysis, to better understand this tough topic. Additionally, researchers could look into how Plath's writing relates to modern issues of identity and trauma, making the results more relevant to today's audience.

Conclusion

Finally, *Daddy* by Sylvia Plath is a deep look at unresolved trauma, repression, grief, and the complicated processes of the Electra complex through the lens of psychoanalytic theory. By looking at the speaker's relationship with her father, the poem shows how her

deepest grief and repressed feelings still affect her and shape her mind. Freud's ideas about trauma, repression, and melancholia help us understand the speaker's inner conflict. She uses violent images and symbolic language as a way to let off steam, but her unresolved grief keeps her from being completely free. The speaker's trouble remembering her father shows how complicated grief is and how hard it is to let go of past trauma. This suggests that psychological healing is an ongoing process rather than a simple conclusion.

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