



## Decoding the emotion code between body and mind in Plath's *Daddy*

Sneha Kumari<sup>1</sup>

Prof. (Dr.) Mamta Rani<sup>2</sup>

PhD. Research Scholar, Department Of English , Bhim Rao Ambedkar Bihar University<sup>1</sup>

M.A. English, Ph.D.,Principal, R.B.B.M. College, B.R.A. Bihar University<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

It is well known that Sylvia Plath is one of the sensational women poets in American Literary World. Sylvia Plath's poem *Daddy* remains one of the most controversial modern poems ever written. It showed the contradictory feelings between love as well as great hatred and disappoints feelings to her beloved daddy, who does not give any affection to her like a biological daughter. It symbolizes the relationship that they once had and how it has affected her throughout her whole life. The father in the poem, just like Plath's father, died when the protagonist was just a child, a young girl. Sylvia Plath's poem *Daddy* is a powerful and haunting piece of literature that delves into complex themes of power dynamics, gender roles, and the struggle for personal identity. The term daddy in Plath's poem is fraught with complexity, reflecting the troubled relationship between the speaker and her father figure. Plath uses the word to symbolize not only the literal father-daughter bond but also the larger societal constructs and power imbalances. This paper, will discuss Plath's poem *Daddy* as example and will attempt to probe into the evolution of the representation of gendered body in her poetry.

**Keywords:** Mental Health, Trauma, Psychoanalysis, Confessional Poetry, Imagery, Symbolism

Sylvia Plath uses her poem, *Daddy*, to express deep emotions toward her father's life and death. With passionate articulation, she verbally turns over her feelings of rage, abandonment, confusion and grief. Though this work is fraught with ambiguity, a reader can infer Plath's basic story. Her father was apparently a Nazi soldier killed in World War II while she was young. Her statements about not knowing even remotely where he was while he was in battle, the only photograph she has left of him and how she chose to marry a man that reminded her of him elude to her grief in losing her father and missing his presence. She goes on talk about how her poor or non-existent relationship with her father caused her to enter an unhealthy relationship. Finally, she conveys a mood of overcoming this man's dark hold on her. Plath's depiction of her father as a dominating and oppressive figure can be seen as a reflection of the power dynamics and conflicts within her relationship with her husband, Hughes. Their marriage was characterized by intense passion but also infidelity and mental health struggles. Plath often felt overshadowed and disempowered in the relationship, mirroring the themes of dominance and control present in her poem *Daddy*. The psychological theories of Sigmund Freud, particularly the Electra complex, provide a lens through which we can understand the complex dynamics that influenced Plath's writing and her experiences in her relationship with Hughes.



Trauma is a psychological and emotional reaction to a very upsetting or unpleasant event or experience. It can be brought on by a variety of circumstances, such as physical or mental abuse, war, accidents, natural disasters, or other traumatic or life-threatening situations. Trauma may cause the mind and body to react in a number of different ways, such as with emotions of dread, worry, sadness, helplessness, and a sensation of being out of control. Trauma symptoms might include nightmares, flashbacks, avoiding things that remind them of the trauma, being overly vigilant, and having trouble with relationships and trust. It may have long-term consequences for a person's mental health and well-being, which may affect their capacity to carry out everyday activities. Overall, Freud's theory of the unconscious can be applied to *Daddy* as a way of understanding the complex and often conflicting relationship between the speaker and her father. The poem can be interpreted as an expression of the speaker's unconscious desires and conflicts, particularly with regard to her sexuality and her relationship with her father.

*Daddy* is a confessional poem that delves deep into the poet's psyche, exploring her feelings of anger, guilt, and sorrow toward her father. The poem is structured into sixteen stanzas, each with five lines, and follows a loose rhyme scheme that adds to the poem's musicality. Sigmund Freud's theories on the psyche, particularly the concept of the unconscious, can be applied to Sylvia Plath's poem *Daddy* in several ways. The poem can be interpreted as a representation of the speaker's unconscious desires and conflicts, particularly with regard to her relationship with her father. In Freud's theory, the unconscious is a part of the psyche that contains repressed thoughts, memories, and desires that the individual is not aware of. These unconscious thoughts and desires can manifest in dreams, fantasies, and other forms of creative expression.

The poem *Daddy* by Sylvia Plath paints a great picture of a daughter and her father, but this poem is more than just that. It symbolizes the relationship that they once had and how it has affected her throughout her whole life. The father in the poem, just like Plath's father, died when the protagonist was just a child, a young girl. Like many young girls, she saw her father as a larger than life figure, a "bag full of God". He was a strong figure, and to the young girl, he must have seemed omnipotent. Thus, he became her father and an image of Daddy, an amalgam of memory and ideal. As such, he is untouchable, "marble heavy", a "ghastly statue" that is too implacable, too distant to reach. Marble is associated with luxury (and thus power), but also it is cold and hard, suggesting a cold, unreachable father Sylvia Plath uses her poem, *Daddy*, to express intense emotions towards her father's life and death and her disastrous relationship with her husband. The speaker in this poem is Sylvia Plath who has lost her father at age ten, at a time when she still adored him unconditionally. Then she gradually realizes the oppressing dominance of her father, and compares him to a Nazi, a devil, and a vampire. Later, the conflict of this relationship continues with her husband which led to a short and painful marriage. In *Daddy* by Sylvia Plath, the author illustrates her feelings of anger and resentment towards her father and husband along with being oppressed for most of her life through her poetic devices of vivid metaphor, imagery, rhyme, tone, and simile.

The poem *Daddy* reflects the relationship between father and daughter. It shows contradictory feelings between love and great hatred and disappoints feelings to her beloved daddy, who does not affection her as a biological daughter. Like a little girl, Plath tried hard to pursue the lost love of her father, and then she married her husband in the adulthood.



Ironically, in the end, it is this enduring love to her father that led to her tragedy. She desperately wanted to find love in her husband; however, her husband's disloyalty, like her father's death, again struck her. Therefore, finally, in the poem, she is through, exhaustedly capitulated by the affection which brings not simply happiness but also severe pain to her, resulting in her contradictory feelings to her father. In conclusion, a deconstructive reading of the poem *Daddy* shows some significant features, including "sliding, abyssal, and undecidable." And all of the contradictory feelings appearing in the lines prove Plath's great hatred and love for her beloved daddy. Nevertheless, because of the characteristic of deconstruction that the meaning in the text is interconnected among "textuality," "rhetoricity," and "intertextuality".

Metaphor plays a major role in this poem because strong metaphors are conveyed throughout the poem though shoes and feet are a recurrent image in this poem; they take on different nuances of meaning as the poem proceeds. In line two, the speaker compares herself to a foot that "lives" in a shoe, the shoe is her father. Analyzing this metaphor on an abstract level is much less helpful than visualizing it. Then the metaphor evokes various helpful associations: Commonly, a shoe protects the foot and keeps it warm, in this poem. However, the shoe is a trap, smothering the foot. The adjective "black" suggests the idea of death, and since the shoe is fitting tightly around the foot, one might think of a corpse in a coffin. Plath thus feels at the same time protected and smothered by her father. Later, the black shoe emerges as a military "boot" (line 49) when the father is called a Nazi.

The image of the poem helps the reader to relate to Plath's harsh life. An example of this is when the devil is introduced with *A cleft in your chin instead of your foot/But no less a devil for that.* (53-54). Again there is the reference to the foot, this one being suspicious just like the origins of the father. The cleft in the foot, the devil's hooves, is compared to the cleft in the father's chin. This is developed further with the images of the father and the husband who is like the father being a "vampire" (72)—a bloodsucking zombie who still haunts her long after his death. Likewise, Plath describes how her life was being drained away as the result of a marriage, similar to that of how a vampire drinks the blood of its victims.

The representation of gendered body in one of Plath's later poems *Daddy* is much more complex as on the one hand it continues with her Freudian interest; on the other, it diverts its attention from Freudian interest to gender politics. Thus, in the later period of her writing, Plath's poetic subjects evolve from her persona's Freudian interests in father-worship to her fury and hatred towards her father and husband and even patricide and self-annihilation, generally her sense of gender politics or her resistance against the so-called "patriarchal nastiness" by Bloom and Harold (2001, 9). Though being influenced by the social culture of her time which required women to be housewives, Plath frequently showed her contempt for the unmarried women professionals in her works such as *The Bell Jar* and early poems like *Two Sisters of Persephone*, and *Spinster* both in 1956 and others, she later showed her sympathy for and identity with Virginia Woolf and *her hatred of men due to their prejudice against women* (Plath, 2000, 461-2). This betrays her gradual change of gender and even feminist consciousness. .

*Daddy* is a powerful and controversial poem that explores the complex relationship between Sylvia Plath and her father. The poem uses powerful imagery and metaphor to convey the suffocating nature of their relationship and the trauma that Plath suffered as a result of it. *Daddy* is a negative, dark poem. However, at the conclusion of the poem it is



clear that Plath was able to resolve her conflicts. She has also been able to evoke great amount of power within the poem to the readers. One can see this from her use of vivid metaphor, imagery, rhyme, tone, and simile as major poetic devices. She finishes the poem with a powerful, “*Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I’m through.*” (80) showing that she has finally reached freedom. its final stanza suggests that Plath has found a way to move beyond her father's influence and find a new identity through her writing. *Daddy* is a seminal work of confessional poetry and a testament to Sylvia Plath's enduring legacy as a writer.

## Cited Reference

- Plath, Sylvia. *Ariel*. New York, Harper, and Row, 1966.
- Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents", in *Civilization, Society and Religion* (Middlesex, 1987). Penguin London, 1991.
- Wagner, Linda (ed.), *Critical Essays on Sylvia Plath* Boston, G. K. Hall and Co., 1984.