



REPRESENTATIONS OF TRAUMA, TRANSFERENCE, SUBALTERN DISCOURSE AND STOCKHOLM SYNDROME IN SYLVIA PLATH'S "DADDY"

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Abstract

Sylvia Plath's controversial poem "Daddy" has usually been interpreted in biographical terms as an allegory of the poet's troubled relationship with her father and her husband: the numerous references in it to Nazi Germany and the Holocaust are generally understood to be metaphors for the dominant and oppressive characters of these male figures. Thus, the aim of this study is to show other aspects such as trauma, transference, and subaltern discourse in the poem and to open the codes within the language. The methodology of this article is conducted through a semiotic reading. This essay reverses the metaphor, focusing on the speaker's constantly shifting perspectives. And it argues, against the tradition, that the biographical context is of secondary importance: the focus of the poem, which was written in the context of the trial and execution of Adolf Eichmann, is on the speaker's problematic identification and engagement with the trauma of the Jews. The analysis illustrates that it can therefore be understood as a unique and complex critique of Nazi ideology and social indoctrination, as they are experienced physically, linguistically, and psychologically.

Keywords: Plath, Daddy, Trauma, Manufactured consent, Stockholm syndrome

1 Introduction

Sylvia Plath's poem "Daddy" was published posthumously in the collection *Ariel* in 1965, but was actually written in October 1962, not long after her divorce from Ted Hughes in July that year, and not long before her death by suicide in February 1963. The poem begins by describing the "Daddy", who is responsible for the misery and the pain, and, as it proceeds, refers to the darkest times of the war embodied in the Nazi concentration camps of Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen. Eventually, those traumatic memories lead the speaker to identify the addressee with physical descriptions in the later parts of the text. Hence, the verse depicts the trauma of the persona and the transference between the narrative voice and 'Daddy' has been like 'vampire' and sucking the blood of the speaker for years, and also the subaltern discourse of how the 'Jews' were lost between their identity and the oppression of the Nazis. The poem concludes with the narrative voice presenting the depiction of the "leader's" death. As it develops, it engages in complex ways with problems of ethnic and linguistic identity, transference and trauma, and what Hannah Arendt called "the banality of evil." (Arendt, 1963). In this study, I will argue, reverse the logic of the poem, where in fact, the father images can be understood as metaphors of Nazism. The poem therefore does not present simply an autobiographical sketch in the previous readings, but instead, an identification with the trauma of the Jews and depictions of the holocaust during the Nazi regime. This reading is first indicated by another aspect of the timing of the poem: it was composed at approximately the same time as the widely publicized execution of Adolf Eichmann in June 1962, which provides the most

immediate cultural framework for reading it. Thus, although the most obvious reference in the poem's title, "Daddy," is to a father or male parent (implying responsibility and trust), and this is a term typically used by children, the word also suggests a man playing that role, a father figure or leader (the German equivalent is "Vater" or "Führer"), whom the speaker addresses in the verse. In the context of the Eichmann trial and execution, this is a reference to the leader who is trusted to lead the nation—the German "Vaterland" or fatherland (Thompson, 2015).

2 Literature Review

Because of the poem's obvious references to a father figure, readers' fascination with the poet's life, and the tendency to take Plath's comment as a reflection of her personal intention, readers of the poem have typically looked at it through biographical or psychoanalytic lenses, focusing, for example, on her uneasy relationship with her father, Otto Plath, or with her husband (e.g. Bassnett, 2005; Goodspeed-Chadwick, 2012). The poem has been considered in terms of Plath's suicide, her divorce, the strained relationship between a daughter and her father, and as confessional poetry; in short, as an embodiment of the series of plots in her relationships (e.g. Axelrod, 2011; Banner, 2002; Bayley & Brain, 2011; Glitz, 2018; Platizky, 1997). As a result, the images and allusions in "Daddy," most of which evoke aspects of Nazism, are usually interpreted as metaphors for the poet's oppression by her father. Zayyani (2017) for example, relates the poem's rhythm to the sound of nursery rhymes and argues that through the use of this poetic device, Plath portrays her suffering and melancholy of thirty years in terms of the memorial of her father, but at the same time she depicts herself as a child calling her father and imagining him through a picture that she has painted in her memory. Later, she turns this into the Nazi camps and the German language, in which she tries to express the same separation and melancholy between herself and her father (Zayyani, 2017, pp. 29-30). Like Zayyani, Strangeways & Plath (1996) confuses the author and the persona in the poem, arguing that Plath seems to seek the concept of freedom through the evocations of and the comparison between the brutal (Nazis) and the sufferer (Jews); from this perspective, it seems to be the lover or the father who has entangled her and deprived her of freedom. However, for Strangeways, the verse is not only about this relationship, but about individuality and identity (Strangeways & Plath, 1996, pp. 370-372). Trauma is one of the aspects on which this article sheds light on Caruth (1996) defines trauma as the shocking incident of an abrupt disastrous situation in which the reaction to that event can be belated or unstrained. This phenomenon seems to emerge after frightening situations, such as; sexual or physical mistreatment of children, wars, or sexual abuse during adulthood (pp. 19-20). O'Shaughnessy (2016) States that Victor Klemperer in his book, *I Shall Bear Witness: The Diaries of Victor Klemperer 1933–41*, provides a woman as an example of the way she uses the same language of the Nazis and the Jews themselves unconsciously, and how they call themselves by the same expressions which psychologically can be derived from "Stockholm syndrome" with a different form (p. 258). In other words, "Stockholm Syndrome" can be depicted within the Jews in another form; they identify themselves often call themselves "Jews" in the language that is used by the Nazis. As Dominick LaCapra has argued, "All history... must more or less blindly encounter the problem of a transference relation to the past whereby the process at work in the object of study acquire their displaced analogs in the historian's account" (LaCapra, 1985, p.11). Transference in psychoanalytical cases refers to the stage in which the patient redirects the passions from their parents for example in terms of ("Oedipus Complex") to their therapist unconsciously during the sessions of the therapy. Strikingly, transference is related to the influence of the trauma and in which it controls the patient's emotions and reactions (Felluga, 2011). While Trauma studies encompass its portrayal in language, its influence on the individual's memory and identity. To say the notion of trauma is related to the definition of how it causes the disruption, that's is experienced and its influence on one's sentimental system and functions. Trauma studies investigate the implications of trauma in "society and literature [by examining its] psychological, rhetorical, and

cultural significance". The field was elaborated in the 1990s, from Freudian therapy on the developments of the concept of trauma (Mambrol, 2018). Subaltern is another concept that is depicted in the poem; Gayatri Spivak calls the subaltern— calls the group of people who are always re-presented and represented in various ways, and they cannot speak for themselves. (Williams & Chrisman, 2013, pp.70-104).

Stockholm Syndrome: is a psychological reaction from the victim or the who is being kidnaped towards the kidnapper or the who is committing a crime. The term is derived from an actual incident that happened in Sweden in 1973, in which a group robbed a bank and they kept the employers as hostages, eventually, a sense of relation and trust developed between the hostages and robbers. Experts in the field of psychoanalysis have investigated the syndrome and have come to the conclusion in which it develops after the threats and the horror that criminal expresses towards the victim, eventually, the moment they stop murdering or harming them, this fear turns to be somehow an appreciation for keeping them alive. Besides that, psychoanalysts state that the syndrome can be expanded into various forms such as "domestic violence, war prisoners, or procured prostitution". In addition, "Stockholm syndrome" is somehow related to the victims of the holocaust – the ones who could survive after the holocaust began to seek a new life. Yet, they kept the fear from the horrible experience they had been through, psychologically those signs they had been identified as "survivor syndrome", "post-traumatic stress disorder" and "concentration camp syndrome".

3 Methodology

This study employs qualitative research and a semiotic reading; the term "Semiotics" is a study that focuses on "signs" in language, which is found by the linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, semiotics shows the relation between the words and their meanings (signifier/ signified) (Britannica.com, 2020). In literary texts, semiotic analysis deals with the codes, signs, the hidden meanings of the words rather than the biography and general themes (Oxford Bibliography.com, 2017). Therefore, in this study, I will focus on the codes, metaphors, and those meanings that are rooted in the language. Therefore, the core of this study is how the codes of the language are opened and reveals the logic behind the terms; the lines in the verse shows the meanings in which are related to deeper philosophical issues; such as, trauma, transference, and Subaltern discourse; for instance, in the line "in the German tongue, in the Polish town" shows the image of a subaltern who is lost between the identity of being Jewish and speaking in German language that seems to be difficult to find their real being and they are always represented. Moreover, the expressions: "you stand at the blackboard, daddy/ In the picture I have of you," shows the memory of a man standing at a blackboard which this recollection has turned into fear and trauma in memory of the speaker. In these terms, the semiotic analysis focuses on the meaning of terms in the literary text – the poem – rather than any reference of the biography of the author.

4 Discussion and Results

The sixteen five-line stanzas of the poem narrate the trauma of the Jews during the holocaust. To begin with, first stanzas that are recounted by the narrative "I," the first line introduces the reader to the sound of soldiers marching, through a staccato rhythm which also creates a visual image of their steps: "you do not do, you do not do/anymore, black shoe". At the same time, the speaker confronts the Daddy figure, addressing him as a "black shoe," and likening its own existence to afoot. The address appears in the language of the poem but may represent inner speech, a series of thoughts taking place in the speaker's mind; the monosyllables and staccato rhythm suggest a sense of exasperation and anger, along with an underlying fear of the sound of marching; the black color of the shoe most obviously suggests the uniform of the SS troops, but also has connotations of evil, darkness, and depression; the time reference evokes various historical periods, from the Thirty Years' War – "for thirty years, poor and whit". The period between the start of the

Third Reich and the execution of Eichmann. The description of the speaker as a foot living in a shoe suggests the constraints on the individual imposed by the uniform, its power and blackness contrasted to the poverty and “whiteness”—nakedness, exposure, vulnerability— of the difficult mental and physical circumstances the soldiers and the war have brought. The most disturbing image here is of the speaker “barely daring to breathe or Achoo”: the implied silence, fear, and horror of those hiding or escaping from the Nazi soldiers and dreading the sound of their boots. The death scene in “daddy, I have had to kill you/ you died before I had time” is quite problematic; critics such as Wagner-Martin see it in biographical terms: in the later stages of her life, after living in the shadow of her dad, Plath is simply a woman trying to get rid of her father (Wagner-Martin, 2003, pp.128-129). Thus daddy is depicted ironically, with a sense of malevolence: “ghastly statue with one gray toe/ Big as a Frisco seal/ and ahead in the freakish Atlantic” – a huge figure which is heavy, monumental, with some divine qualities, and authoritative—but at the same time, is too heavy to bear, ghastly, a statue, or simply a bag or container. The dead body has a single “gray toe” sticking out, its head is associated with the “freakishness” of the ocean. This ambivalence represents a response to trauma, which Cathy Caruth defines as the shocking incident of an abrupt disastrous situation in which the reaction to that event can be belated or unstrained. This phenomenon seems to emerge after frightening situations, such as sexual or physical mistreatment of children, wars, or sexual abuse during adulthood (1996, pp.19-20). In modern trauma studies, as Michelle Balaev points out, there is an affirmation of the paradoxical fact that trauma is an inner conflict that leads one to the destruction of identity (2008, pp.149). However, in the case of a group of people who share the same language, religion, culture, and belong to the same ethnic group, the “massive trauma” constructs the identity. As they experience a disastrous historical event such as a war, they share the same attitudes, and this is also the case for individuals in the group who were absent in the actual moments of the trauma, but read or hear about it afterward (Balaev, 2008, p.152).

The paradox of identity is suggested as the speaker shifts into German (“Ach du”) to pray to bring back “Daddy”—to “recover you.” The expressions show a problem—that of “transference.” In psychoanalytic cases, this refers to a coping mechanism where the patient unconsciously redirects passions felt towards his or her parents to the therapist during the sessions of the therapy (Felluga, 2011). As Dominick LaCapra has argued, “All history... must more or less blindly encounter the problem of a transference relation to the past whereby the process at work in the object of study acquire their displaced analogs in the historian’s account” (LaCapra, 1985, p.11). The tendency among readers of this poem to deflect attention away from the references to Nazism and the Holocaust and towards the poet’s life, therefore, suggests that this tactic is a mechanism for coping with the poem’s explicit subject.

This subject is made clear in the following expressions, where the speaker’s prayer is uttered: “in the German tongue, in the Polish town”. in which the obvious reference is to the German invasion of Poland in 1939, that lit the spark for the Second World War, but now the language shifts back and forth unpredictably between the invader and the invaded. The prayer (“Ach, du”) is spoken in the “German tongue” in a “Polish town.” It is a prayer in the sense that the first-person personal pronoun “du” is used in German to address God; this is an echo of the “bag full of God” used earlier in the text to characterize the father figure. However, the speaker is praying using the language of the oppressor, the expressions – “but the name of the town is common/ my Polack friend” which uses the derogatory term “Polack,” and represents the destruction, the “scraping flat” of the “Polish town.” There is some ambiguity in the expression “Polack friend,” which can be taken either ironically if read from the perspective of the Germans, or as a suggestion that the speaker empathizes or identifies with the friend under oppression. The repetition of “wars” suggests the repeated attacks on the town and its disintegration. The sense of individuality among the victims is flattened out in the large scale of destruction, and lost to thought among the perpetrators in the line: “I could never tell where you put your foot, your root.” is what implied by Hannah Arendt’s expression “the banality of evil,” in her analysis of the Eichmann trial; as Judith Butler explains:

if a crime against humanity had become in some sense "banal" it was precise because it was committed in a daily way, systematically, without being adequately named and opposed. In a sense, by calling a crime against humanity "banal", she was trying to point to the way in which the crime had become for the criminals accepted, routinized, and implemented without moral revulsion and political indignation and resistance. [...] What had become banal – and astonishingly so – was the failure to think. Indeed, at one point the failure to think is precisely the name of the crime that Eichmann commits (Butler, 2011).

The realization causes the speaker to choke, as if the language itself is trapped in the barbed wire fence of a concentration camp, to shift positions, and to identify again with the victims: "the tongue stuck in my jaw/ it stuck in a barb wire snare/ Ich, ich, ich, ich,". The speaker's inability to speak may be out of fear, but it also suggests that the native language ("my tongue"), whether Polish, Hebrew, or that of the individual, is being trapped by the foreign language (German). The German pronoun "ich," meaning "I," is repeated as if the speaker is stuttering; it also presents both a visual image of the barbed wires and a sound image evoking the rhythm and echo of the Nazi soldier's boots marching. The Daddy figure now turns into a representation of "every German," and the language itself becomes offensive or "obscene": it brings fear and silence, but also the sound of jackboots, the image of barbed wire, the associated visual images of the prison, and the echoes of incarceration as the speaker's voice holds both anger and terror deep inside.

The German language is the "engine" of the trains to the death camps, and the choking sounds of the speaker—"ich, ich, ich, ich"—are the sounds of their "chuffing." This is the moment of recognition, in which the speaking voice questions his own identity, linguistic and ethnic: "I began to talk like a Jew"/ I think I may well be a Jew". The speaker's inability to present himself is the dilemma of what Gayatri Spivak calls the subaltern—a subject which cannot speak for itself, as its language is excluded, constrained within the "shoe" of the dominant ideology; the subaltern is instead always represented, re-presented, and constituted in various ways as an absence by the language of the oppressor—which says, for example, that he "talks like a Jew"—or it is simply excluded (Williams & Chrisman, 2013, pp.70-104).

The description is uttered from the perspective of the Nazis: it moves from the speaker's talking "like a Jew" to thinking about the possibility that he "may well be" one, to acknowledging that he "maybe a bit of a Jew." Behind the clichés of "normal" life—everyday comments on the Tyrol snows, or "the clear beer of Vienna"—the Nazi ideology of "purity" arises, and the speaker identifies with a "gypsy ancestress"—a nomadic figure without a mainstream identity. The "Taroc pack" is traditionally associated with the figure of the fortune-teller, and the "weird luck" in this context suggests the misfortune of being Jewish. This identity lies behind the language of the oppressor which the speaker uses, and as it asserts itself, it undermines and negates the symbols and images associated with that language: "I have always been scared of you/ with your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygook". Once the language has been dismissed as simply bureaucratic jargon (the word "gobbledygoo[k]" was coined during World War II to describe doublespeak and obfuscation), and the images are recognized as superficial, Daddy can be recognized as "Not God" but merely a collection of symbols of ideologies, like the archetypal image of the swastika, the panoptic gaze of the Aryan blue eyes idealized by Hitler, and the blackness of the swastika and SS, the speaker's fluctuation between the identities of Nazi and Jew, oppressor and victim, suggest that what they in fact point to are some of the complexities—and ironies—that characterize the kinds of trauma bonding known as "KZ-syndrome", "concentration camp syndrome" or "Stockholm syndrome":

Trauma Bonding is evidenced in any relationship in which the connection defies logic and is very hard to break. The components necessary for a trauma bond to form are a power differential, intermittent good/bad treatment, and high arousal and bonding periods... This type of bonding can take place in concentration camps and kidnap experiences where the intense fear and will to survive can cause a bond with the enemy. This bonding is perpetuated by the

imbalance of power and the manipulative nature of intermittent cycling of abuse with acts of kindness (Logan, 2018, p.67).

This, not a simplified father-daughter story or a questionable Freudian model, is what has described the ambivalence, and the strange love-hate relationship between the speaker and the figure of Daddy, the ironic bond of the Speaker-Daddy relationship reflects an “imbalance of power,” and the next verse points to the mechanism which underlies this power differential, the expression in the line “In the picture I have of you” – here, the Daddy figure is pictured—the “picturing” may refer to an actual “photograph” or to a vision of him in the speaker’s memory—in the position and with the authority of a teacher, like “a bag full of God”; in other words, as the representative of the school. This institution is what Althusser describes as the dominant “ideological state apparatus,” it is by an apprenticeship in a variety of know-how wrapped up in the massive inculcation of the ideology of the ruling class that the relations of production in a capitalist social formation, i.e. the relations of exploited to exploiters and exploiters to exploited, are largely reproduced. The mechanisms which produce this vital result for the capitalist regime are naturally covered up and concealed by a universally reigning ideology of the School, universally reigning because it is one of the essential forms of the ruling bourgeois ideology: an ideology that represents the school as a neutral environment purged of ideology (because it is... lay) (Althusser, 2011, pp.1495). The process is continued in adulthood, as Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, have argued, through the “mass media,” which in today’s world uses communication technologies to provide the public with entertainments, news, and education, but at the same time, through hidden and subtle messaging, communicates and imposes certain political or religious ideologies on the audience (Chomsky & Herman, 2008, p.1). In the context of the Second World War, it was using similar propaganda techniques—advertisements, posters, and schools—that the German Nazis “brainwashed” large numbers of the population to be anti-Semitic (Voigtländer & Voith, 2015, p.7931). It is in this sense that the German language becomes “obscene,” and that as an agent of “manufactured consent,” Daddy, despite his seemingly harmless appearance (the “cleft chin,”), is “no less a devil”; implied in the phrase are the cloven feet traditionally associated with Satan. This image of evil refers back to the SS uniform with its “black shoe” and “black swastika” which now come together in the figure of the “black man” and the “red heart”—evoking the Nazi flag and armband, with their black swastika in a white circle on a red background. The image is both physical and emotional, and embodies the paradox of Stockholm syndrome: it is brutal and violent on the one hand (the heart of the victim is bitten in two), but ironically suggests a “broken heart” heart on the victim’s part—love, betrayal, or broken promises. The following terms—“I was ten when they buried you/ at twenty I tried to die/ And get back, back, back to you.”— indicate a failed suicide attempt, or perhaps, figuratively, an attempt by the speaker to suppress his own identity. Taking a biographical approach, Humaira Aslam understands this to mean that Plath’s love and admiration for her father turned into hatred after his death, so it was a shock for her to find herself alone and those expressions suggest her suicide attempts, through which she expressed her need for her “daddy” (Aslam, 2015, pp. 215-217). However, the text is clearly much more complex: these lines refer back ambivalently to Daddy’s premature death and the speaker’s prayer “to recover you” as well as his desire for revenge, to “get back at him” which were indicated in the second verse (“Daddy, I have had to kill you. / you died before I had time); at the same time, they point to a desire to be together with Daddy again. The speaker’s attempt to “get into the sack” with Daddy, even with his skeleton (“bones”) is subverted, through a series of images—suicide, bones, sack, glue—which evoke the chemical processes, tortures, and horrors of the concentration camps. As one survivor, Edith Birkin, recollected,

With this atmosphere of death all the time you know, and this unbelievable situation of people being... you could smell, you could smell these people being burnt. All the time you smelt this... it was a little bit like you know, when people used to boil glue, it was the bones that smelt like glue (Birkin, n.d.).

The terms in the lines “and then I knew what to do/ I made a model of you/ a man in black with a Meinkampf look”. Biographically inclined critics have taken the idea of the model here and the “I do, I do” to reflect Plath’s relationship with Ted Hughes—a substitute for her father—and the “seven years” in the following verse to reflect the duration of her marriage to him (1956-63). Susan Bassnett suggests this poem shows Plath’s strength as a woman who has suffered from the failure of her marriage (Bassnett, 2005, p. 42); while Heather Cam sees her finding life with her father’s death after twenty years of suffering, and eventually finding freedom, comparing Hughes and Otto Plath to brutes and vampires (Cam, 1987, p. 432). Parvin Ghasemi and others see the poem as confessional, showing how the speaker shifts her reactions from the father to the husband, Ted Hughes, who is overlooking Sylvia’s life (Ghasemi, 2008, pp. 287-288). These readings, however, do not take into account other aspects of the language of the text which suggest that what is being described as a mechanism for coping with the horrors of the Holocaust. The speaker is unable to find closure, and is haunted by the memory and thought of Daddy, because of this figure’s “premature death” which prevents him from personally killing it—whether it represents Eichmann or Hitler, or Nazis in general. He compensates for this lack of closure by constructing an image (“a model”) of the figure of Daddy to “kill”: a man wearing the SS uniform (dressed “in black”), looking through the lens of Hitler’s Mein Kampf, and who takes sadistic pleasure in torture (“the rack and the screw”). The closure comes when the speaker utters the performative expression “I do, I do”: when he does what he “knew what to do.” This act of killing/closure explains why the speaker is able to address Daddy at the start of the poem and say to him: “you do not do, you do not do / Anymore”; the verb “to do,” like “to be,” signifies action, existence, and life. “If I’ve killed one man, I’ve killed two/ the vampire who said he was you”. The poem ends with a visual image of the scene after psychological closure is achieved. This is the closing scene of the allegory “acted out” by the speaker, and it is staged as a celebration in a village after a vampire has been killed by driving a stake through its heart. It is a scene of collective relief and letting go, but it is also a personal breakthrough: the speaker has “come through” (survived), and is done, “through with” the “Daddy” of the title; the foot has escaped the shoe, “broken through”; and the speaker’s language ends with the tongue expressing itself, “coming through” the barbed wire in the jaw.

5 Conclusion

Plath’s “Daddy” has been considered highly controversial for its treatment of genocide and the Holocaust (Strangeways & Plath, 1996). Largely because it has been approached biographically (see Asotić, 2015), and seen as using images of the unthinkable to describe the poet’s personal relationship with her father. Much of the controversy may be resolved if the metaphor is reversed: if what is presented as a “love-hate” relationship between daughter and father is instead understood in terms of what LaCapra calls “a transference relation to the past” (LaCapra, 1985, p. 11). The poem can then be understood from the perspective of Stockholm syndrome and coping mechanisms, and read as an empathetic allegory of a compulsive attachment to traumatic memories of the Holocaust and the struggle to deal with them. As a result, traumatic memories—the mental “voices” speaking from a distance, as if through a “black telephone”—are cut off, and the speaker has put an end to them: “I’m finally through.” The effect of mentally killing the image is to provide a way of dealing with the reality it represents—the projected memories or ghosts of the undead who haunt and drain the speaker’s life like a vampire.

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