

An Analysis of the Theme of Sylvia Plath's Daddy

— from Different Narrative Perspectives

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Abstract: Sylvia Plath is one of the famous representative poets of American confessional poetry, she had been abandoned by two men in her whole life, one is her father, and the other is her husband. There are strong resentment and attack to these two men in her poems, therefore she was put up to be a pioneer of feminism by feminist, but she didn't admit to this identity. Among her literary achievement, her masterpiece Daddy is of profound historic and cultural significance. It tells the speaker's complicated feelings towards "daddy", which plays a multi-role in the poem. This paper analyzes the poetry's theme according to different narrative perspectives---a daughter, a wife, and a female representative.

Keywords: Sylvia Plath; Daddy; narrative perspectives

1. Introduction

Sylvia Plath (1932-1963) was an American novelist, poet, and essayist. She was born in Boston, Massachusetts on October 27, 1932, and grew up in a well-off middle class home. Her father, Otto Plath, a German-speaking immigrant from Poland, taught at Boston University as a biology professor. Sylvia Plath married fellow poet Ted Hughes in 1956, and they lived together in the United States and then in England. They had two children before separating in 1962 (2007).

Confessional Poetry is a style of poetry that emerged in the United States during the 1950s. It has been described as poetry "of the personal", focusing on extreme moments of individual experience, the psyche, and personal trauma, including previously and occasionally still taboo matters such as mental illness, sexuality, and suicide, often set in relation to broader social themes (2005). As a representative figure of American confession poetry, Sylvia Plath has made great contributions to the development of American poetry, feminist poetry, and feminism. This paper analyzes the theme of her poetry Daddy in different narrative perspectives which can make a more comprehensive study about Sylvia Plath and her work.

2. Analysis from different narrative perspectives

Daddy is a recognized masterpiece of Plath, she describes the multiple identities of the characters "Daddy"---a father, a husband, and a male representative through monologue which is widely used in confessional poetry, the narrator "I", also changed the role---a daughter, a wife, and a female representative correspondingly.

2.1 As a daughter---the image of father

As for this poem, the poet explained the poem briefly in a BBC interview: "The poem is spoken by a girl with an Electra complex. The father died while she thought he was God. Her case is complicated by the fact that her father was also a Nazi and her mother very possibly part Jewish. In the daughter the two strains marry and paralyze each other - she has to act out the awful little allegory once over before she is free of it" (2004). Properly speaking, the poet herself is exactly a patient with double symptoms which are "Electra complex" and "mental illness". Her father died when she was eight years old which has made a deep impression in her mind, he was an outstanding professor of Entomology at the Boston University, he specialized in the research of bees and has published many influential academic papers, Plath wrote five series of poems about the bees after reading her

father's article, which shows how important the father's position is in her mind. While on the other hand, the early death of his father made the young Plath a feeling of abandonment, left her a heart wound that was hard to heal all her life; imprisonment, depression, eccentric. Therefore, this made the contradictory attitude of the poet to his father---strong attachment and strong rebellion.

By writing this poem, Plath was releasing her inner hostility as a means of closure for the treatment she had received. And from it we can see a daughter to a father's strong attachment and hatred closely interweaved together (2012).

2.2 As a wife---the image of husband

The marriage of Plath and the poet Ted Hughes has always been a hot topic in the literary world. She met Hughes, a Cambridge poet when she studied in the University of Cambridge in 1955, and they married in second year. Plath was very satisfied with this marriage, she thought they were perfect couple. She even promised that she would do her best to help Hughes to achieve his poetry work. In fact, Hughes's first collection of poetry-"the eagle in the rain", which has won the Poetry Prize at that time, were completed with the great help of Plath's effort. But as Hughes's fame getting more and more famous, Plath's jealous instinct and the differences in understanding between Britain and the United States cultures in the "gender role", even worse, Hughes had a betrayal of marriage, all of these factors lurks the mental depression in Plath's heart became more and more complicated, their seven years of marriage also broke up.

Besides this, her husband also victimized her through the power he exerted as a man, both by assuming he should have the literary career and through his infidelity. Plath felt relegated to a subordinate, "feminine" position which stripped from her any autonomy or power.

2.3 As a female---the image of male representative

Plath grew up in the war years (1932-1963), she was in a teenage period of her physical and mental growth during the Second World War, which undoubtedly left an indelible wound in her young mind. She made a sketch of World War II in more than half of length in the poem Daddy, we can see there are lots of the nouns related to the war in third to tenth stanza of the poetry, such as "the German tongue", "the Polish town", "Luftwaffe", "Fascist" and so on. The poet considers the Jewish Holocaust during World War II as a history of suffering, so that improve the overall height of the poetry, and gives the poem a more profound connotation.

Today's feminists claim that the war is usually men's game, the women are victims of wars. Plath, on the one hand, criticized the war mercilessly, and on the other hand, satire the attachment and incapability of women in men's war games. The poet wrote women's psychological misunderstandings and distorted malformed attitudes in a mockery tone. It is clear that "Daddy" is the representative of the fascist and the symbol of the tyrannical and violent male, and "I" is the spokesman of all the female. The focus of poetry is shifted from the relationship between the father and the daughter to the relationship between the male and the female.

Besides these, Plath also felt like a victim to the men in her life, including her father, her husband, and the great male-dominated

literary world. Her poetry can often be understood as response to these feelings of victimization, and many of the poems with a male figure can be interpreted as referring to any or all of these male forces in her life.

3. Conclusion

Suicide and death are an eternal theme of Sylvia Plath's poetry, and the poet runs through them in her whole life (2003). The poem Daddy ends with the death of "Daddy" and "I", but the meanings of the two kinds of death are quite different. The death of "Daddy" is the complete disappearance of the fascist male world, and the death of "I" is the return of peace in mind and female war victory. Maybe Plath's suicide is to imitate "I" in Daddy, or to imitate lots of suicides in her works. All in all, we can say, Sylvia Plath death left an eternal regret to the literary world.

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