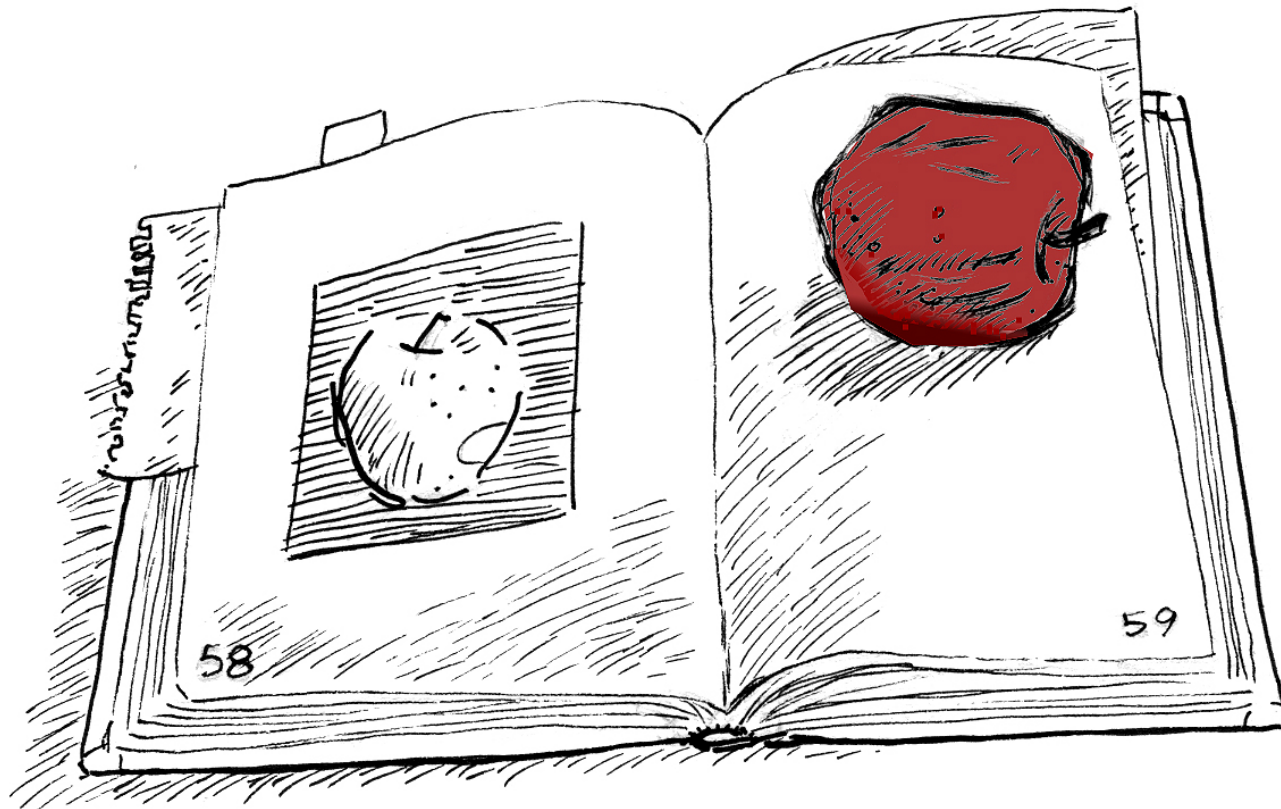


# Sylvia Plath

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# *Daddy*

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## **Plath's Version of Confessionalism promotes:**

- personality of poet blurs into persona; *yet* keep in mind, until the reader uncovers Plath's biographical information the concentration remains on the poem itself as the focal point, not the life of the poet
- psychological portrayal of a character through monologue; to define what is meant by "experience" by exposing any possible subconscious influences in a character's waking life.
- stream of consciousness: the reader is lost in the thoughts of an intense interior monologue.
- over-embellishment of personality traits, using frank, painfully honest attitudes

# *Daddy*

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## **Confessional Poetry**

- modern movement in poetry, begun in Fifties
- involves deeply personal themes with open, public confessions to the reader regarding the writer's inner self
- common themes include:
  - > depression
  - > sexual experimentation
  - > drugs
  - > mental illness
- taboo subjects such as suicide, abortion, menopause, and even mention of the female menstrual cycle were all common topics during this time
- subjects generally not accepted by the status quo of suburban America
- often uses pop cultural references and historical allusions

# *Daddy*

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*What taboo topics are addressed in “Daddy”?*

*What pop cultural references does Plath use?*

*How similar is the persona’s conflict with Beatrice in “Rappaccini’s Daughter”?*

*— or with James Joyce’s “Eveline”?*

*— or with William Faulkner’s “A Rose for Emily”?*

# *Daddy*

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## **Similarities with T. S. Eliot's "Prufrock":**

- *psychological* sequence of thoughts opposed to *logical* sequences of information
- a monologue showing a private voice in a conversational tone with the persona speaking to herself; stream of consciousness
- the title contradicts the reader's first expectations; the term of endearment is thus twisted into an ugly ironic meaning
- irregular rhyming patterns; free verse; throughout her poem Plath uses one common rhyming sound similar to "you"
- private associations and symbols; only the persona understands the full significance of the representations

# *Daddy*

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## **Contrasts with T. S. Eliot's "Prufrock":**

- regularized cinquain stanzas
- allusions specific to recent history and pop culture of her time—  
whereas Eliot uses mainly allusions to cultural, classic literature
- an *unnamed* persona, with a close tie-in to Plath's own personal history  
and personal attitudes
- a persona disconnected from her father and husband;  
Eliot establishes a persona disconnected from the female gender
- Plath's figure experiences an aspect of intense psychological trauma;  
Eliot's persona is a victim of modern society or his own weaknesses
- a sense of triumph at the closure; Prufrock does not seem to learn from his  
rambling. He is even disconnected from himself and his fantasies.

# *Daddy*

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## **One Aspect of the Theme**

**Father** > image of perfect icon <**Husband**

# *Daddy*

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## **One Aspect of the Theme**

**Father** > image of perfect icon <**Husband**

- A *symbolic* murder of both frees the persona from further psychological trauma.
- The closure of the poem offers a bitter triumph.
- She will begin *to attempt* to reconstruct her identity without either influence.



# *Daddy*

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Plath composed the poem in October 1962, and recited the poem for BBC radio, months before her death in February 1963. In her introduction for the reading she commented:

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 the 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 allegory once over before she is free of it (293).

After several readings, what results is one can mirror the persona in the poem with Sylvia Plath's own biography—she leaves many personal symbols in the work which point directly to events in her life.

Plath, Sylvia. *The Collected Poems*. Ted Hughes, Editor. New York: Harper & Row, 1981. Print.

# *Daddy*

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However, what is important to remember, the persona's narrative is *not* an exact duplicate of the poet; the voice is an over-exaggerated image of Plath's own emotions and psychological make-up.

Looking at Plath's own public statement about the poem's declarations, her theme is not an open confessional, but rather a discussion of paralysis.

Similar to one of Eliot's themes in "Prufrock": modern life dehumanizes and minimalizes the average individual to a point of bleak existence.

# *Ted Hughes*

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In recent years, Sylvia Plath's poet-husband Ted Hughes published a collection of poetry which responds specifically to many of Plath's own work.

In 1998 the collection of work was published under the title: *Birthday Letters*; he dedicated it to his two children. In October of that same year he passed away at age of sixty-eight.

As a poet-of-worth himself, it is only natural that he would react to his former wife's actions in a similar fashion: emotional, symbolic poetry.

The collection consists of eighty-eight poems which directly address, with just two exceptions, Plath.

# *Ted Hughes*

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Until this time, Hughes never published work regarding the failed marriage nor about his estranged wife's suicide. Some critics view the book as a means of seeking redemption or as a means to avoid full blame for the dramatic incident.

In one poem in particular, simply titled "Black Coat," he seems to specifically respond to the metaphors and symbols presented in Plath's poem "Daddy."

In this poem he states:

I did not feel

How, as your lenses tightened,

He (Plath's 'Daddy') slid into me (103).

Hughes, Ted. *Birthday Letters*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1998. Print.