REPRESENTATIONS OF AUTHORITY FIGURES AND TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE: LOWELL AND PLATH

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Abstract:Paradoxically, representations of, and responses to, traumatic experience in relation to authority figures had become particularly outstanding in American literature in the early postwar age, in what had been perceived as the most conformist years, the late 1950s and early 1960s. Some of the most memorable of them were in relation to authoritative patriarchal figures ranging from the personal to the public sphere. These representations involved individual responses like those manifested in the 'tranquilized Fifties' in what came to be called Beat and confessional poetry, responses to tradition, the Establishment, public figures. Given the limited space of the current text, the emphasis will be on Lowell and 'transatlantic' Plath, while a variety of voices and figures provide the thick texture in which the two authors' memorable contributions are to be assessed.

Keywords: trauma, anxiety of influence, acting out, working through, confessional

For some time now, representations of traumatic experience have featured prominently in the public space, both in the wider range of mass media communication and in literature, poetry and fiction alike, a trend considerably supported and theorized by such works as Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996). In her turn, Caruth had followed the drift of seminal texts in intellectual history and trauma studies linked to Dominick LaCapra and his books on representations of the Holocaust, rewriting history, exploring trauma.[1] Since then, trauma theory and a considerable stream of literature engaging with it have been very visible, starting from forms of remembering trauma through Freudian ideas refashioned by LaCapra and Caruth, particularly through 'acting out' and 'working through.'

However, representations of, and responses to, traumatic experience had become particularly noticeable in American literature much earlier, more specifically in the early postwar age. Some of the most memorable of them were in relation to authoritative patriarchal figures, emblematic figures of the powers that be in an age dominated by the power elites, to borrow C.Wright-Mills's famous phrase and eponymous volume. These representations ranged from an engagement with the violence of World War II to individual responses like those manifested in the 'tranquilized Fifties' in the confessional poetry of such authors as Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell, John Berryman. Given the limited space of the current text, the emphasis will be on Lowell and Plath, while a variety of voices and figures provide the thick texture in which the two authors' memorable contributions are to be assessed.

Therefore, in addition to the trauma that these texts deal with in artistic form as ways of coping with individual and collective experience, it is also worth considering, in addition to the literary and theoretical contexts which gave particular significance to these texts, aspects of the wider cultural environment in which they functioned. In so doing, an emphasis is laid on the claim that literary texts are not merely artistic reflections of the wider, extra-literary human experience, but active participants in the overall cultural conversations that shape this human experience as site of confrontation, struggle, negotiation, sometimes, if ever, consensus.

[1]Among the most influential being *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1994, and *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.

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In terms of a response, not only to traumatic experience, but to influential predecessors in the fashion a little later postulated by Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*[2], postwar poets such as the confessionals Lowell, Snodgrass, Plath, Sexton, Berryman, have naturally been seen in opposition to the more lucid Modernist 'façades' of literary monuments of previous poetry, especially in opposition to such literary expressions as those promoted by young T.S. Eliot in his influential 'Tradition and the Individual Talent.'

A far from impersonal poet, Eliot had tried hard to disentangle his creation from his psychological turmoil: 'Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. […] The emotion of art is impersonal.'[3] Eliot's professed endeavor was a continual effort to distance himself as a creator from himself as a sensitive man who suffers, who is experiencing pain.

Paula Hayes stresses the impact and influence that important Modernist poets and critics had on the representation of subjective experience in less subjective, more impersonal artistic forms up to the publication of Robert Lowell's 'confessional manifesto': 'Certain critics—T.E. Hulme, Ford Maddox Ford, Allen Tate, and T.S. Eliot—influenced high modernism so severely that the ramifications of their views lingered well up until the publication of Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* in 1959.'[4] Then, to come back to Bloom's theory of poetic influence, of rebellion against the literary fathers, one can compare the new poets emerging in the late 1950s and early sixties in America with the story of blind Oedipus, influence and revisionary insight recounted in *The Anxiety of Influence*: 'Oedipus, blind, was on the path of oracular godhood, and the strong poets that followed him by transforming their blindness towards their precursors into the revisionary insights of their own work'(10). The deliberate blindness as revolt against influence and authority figures in general is part of the poetic representations performed by such poets as Lowell and Plath.

Although a declared disciple of such influential figures as T.S. Eliot and Allen Tate, young Robert Lowell will try hard to be as 'personal' as possible, exacerbating this direction in his poetry up to M.L. Rosenthal placing him at the center of his confessional canon, from his first review of a new kind of American poetry[5] to his 1960 book *The Modern Poets*, in which 'Robert Lowell and the Poetry of Confession' will feature prominently as one of the sub-chapters. Therefore, the first critical acknowledgement of a new, anti-Modernist, anti-impersonal attitude in poetry was called 'confessional,' and the interpretation of the new label led to mixed responses.

Was confession to be seen as a raw turning loose of emotion, an honest expression of one's psychic vulnerability to trauma, in defiance of T.S. Eliot's pronouncements in his famous essay on the impersonality of poetry? One can see this new kind of poetry in opposition to the professed impersonality of previous poetry or in terms of a sort of special relationship between the two poles, as Steven K. Hoffman appears to state from the very title of his essay on the new poetic subgenre: 'Impersonal Personalism: The Making of a Confessional Poetic.' In it, he describes this poetry in terms of a fusion of a tendency toward consciousness building and personalism and elaborate masking techniques, a fusion which allows both inroads into archetypal terrain and into the examination of pressing socio-cultural issues.[6]

A fellow poet and colleague of Lowell's from the same 'doomed' so-called confessional generation, John Berryman describes his own artistic recipe of dealing with traumatic experience, as recounted by Haffenden in his biography of the poet. Berryman is shown as entertaining the hope

[2] Although first published in 1973, Blooms's volume should be seen in relation to earlier developments in archetypal approaches, strongly influenced by Freudian theory, especially by the Oedipus complex narratives that were influencing both theoretical and artistic approaches in the 1950s and 1960s.
[3] T. S. Eliot. 'Tradition and the Individual Talent.' *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature*. Vol. 2. Gen. eds. F. Kermode, and J. Hollander. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973: 2019.
[4] Paula Hayes. *Robert Lowell and the Confessional Voice*. New York/ Washington, D.C./Baltimore/ Bern/ Frankfurt/ Berlin/ Brussels/ Vienna/ Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013: 114.
[5] M.L. Rosenthal. "Poetry as Confession." *Nation* (19 Sept. 1959), pp. 154 – 155.
[6] Steven K. Hoffman. 'Impersonal Personalism: The Making of a Confessional Poetic.' *ELH*. Vol.45. No.4 (Winter, 1978): 688.

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that, after a period of psychic peace and quiet, he will find himself in a challenging situation, an ordeal to which he will react with a kind of angry despair: 'My idea is this: the artist is extremely lucky who is presented with the worst possible ordeal that will not actually kill him.'[7] Is that an innocent victim's passive attitude to trauma, honestly and sincerely confessing to his psychoanalyst the revisitations of previous traumatic experiences, as gradually emerging from the unconscious? The answer is obviously not, and Berryman, like other so-called confessional poets, fought hard to challenge such a simplistic view on confession to traumatic experience. As to the label of 'confessional' applied to his work, on various occasions in interviews and public appearances, Berryman dismissed his being placed in this particular association.[8] A Freudian reaction to earlier authority figures, considering that both him and other such great authors as Vladimir Nabokov rejected any Freudian echoes in their work?

Whether the poets themselves liked the confessional label or not, the kind of engagement each had with trauma and post-traumatic symptoms may start from earlier definitions of their work in terms of equally early definitions of what some called confessional poetry. Thus, although Lowell is the first poet to be called confessional, Sandra M. Guilbert, in the 1970s, finds this kind of poetry 'a distinct female mode.'[9] She does not see this in terms of such patriarchal stereotypes as 'frailty or weakness equates the feminine,' but in terms of a development of a certain mythology of the self, which will later be explored in some of Plath's poems, thus contributing to a discussion of engagement with trauma in terms of myth and ritual, rather than in terms of passive confession of vulnerability.

Guilbert's interpretation of confessionalism as poetry of self-definition traces a long tradition of such writing, long before Lowell and Berryman 'to such male mythologists of the self as Whitman and Yeats to Wordsworth and Byron, those romantic patriarchs whose self-examinations and self-dramatizations probably fathered not only the poetry of what Keats called the egotistical sublime but also the more recent ironic mode we might call the egotistical ridiculous.'[10] Guilbert perceptively alludes to such emotional overkills as those of male authors like Snodgrass, which might verge on the egotistical ridiculous, but she also draws attention to the engagement with trauma as performance, as dramatization, in which confession is secondary, acting is central.

However, the first combination that is bound to draw attention to the relevance of this kind of poetry dealing with trauma and its echoes has to link personal experience and the public stage in postwar America, in contexts provided by both such towering figures lurking from the immediate past as Sigmund Freud, by intellectual history, as well as by socio-cultural and political reality. All this, considering that this undertaking is made from a 21st century perspective, should also accommodate more recent approaches, like the above-mentioned impact that trauma studies started making in the 1990s. An account of all this is complex, and can have various ways of weaving together voices and narratives, poetic and otherwise, starting with one particular episode, public statement, poetic expression, prominent figure… or another beginning episode.

If one sees trauma, initially perceived as a body wound, then as a psychic wound, as having a wider significance in such terms as Caruth's 'trauma, narrative and history' or LaCapra's 'history, theory, trauma' in two of the above-mentioned books, then Robert Lowell's 'confessional itinerary' through trauma, its ghosts from a more remote or more immediate past and its effects on the poet himself, as well as its impact on the public sphere in postwar America, is a good starting point in weaving the personal and the public.

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[7] Qtd. J. Haffenden. *John Berryman*. London: Macmillan, 1980:1.

[8] Joel Connaroe quotes a revelatory excerpt from an interview with Berryman: 'Interviewer: You, along with Lowell, Sylvia Plath, and several others, have been called a confessional poet. How do you react to that label? Berryman: With rage and contempt! Next question'(Connaroe 109).

[9] S.M.Guilbert. '"My Name is Darkness": The Poetry of Self-Defintion.' *Contemporary Literature*. Vol. 18: 4 (Autumn, 1977): 444.

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Like another important literary figure, Thomas Pynchon, Robert Lowell's family past is closely linked to America's White Anglo-Saxon Protestant history. Will it be surprising that both authors will try to symbolically kill the authority figure associated with this impressive past, the Father associated with this long and distinguished family history, the more so when it comes to dealing with aspects of individual traumatic experience as well? Robert Lowell, or, to be more historically precise, Robert Traill Spence Lowell, IV, had been born into a famous 'Brahmin' family in Boston, Massachusetts. On his father's side, the Lowells included many scholars and distinguished public figures[11], such as James Russell Lowell, poet and ambassador to France, and the modernist poet Amy Lowell. On his mother's side, the Winslows could be traced back to the early settlers that had come to America on board the Mayflower in 1620.

Like many of his ancestors, Robert Lowell had attended Harvard. However, the future poet did not graduate from that illustrious institution. After two years spent at Harvard, in a fit of mania that would be followed by others in later life, the young man knocked his father down. One cannot help interpreting the troubled son's very aggressive gesture symbolically. The father and Father figure he revolts against (otherwise rendered as a pathetic figure in *Life Studies* as "Commander Lowell") is a figure that appears to represent the whole New England Puritan tradition of his family history and of America's history of the previous centuries. This can obviously be linked to the symbolism of Freudian psychoanalysis, which will feature prominently in Lowell's poetic career. However, the actual father he deals with is a far cry from the authoritarian father figure of Freudian psychoanalysis, even if the Lowell family as a whole assumes the towering presence against which a certain form of rebellion appears to achieve a more dignified stance. The pathetic figure of 'Commander Lowell' as shown in some of the poems of Robert Lowell's first volume of confessional poetry, *Life Studies*, was too much of a … bad thing, as it were. Even M.L. Rosenthal, who first 'marketed' confessionalism through his above-mentioned first article and then his 1960 book, finds the representation of intimate, embarrassing episodes in one's father's life hard to put up with. He finds the volume as a whole containing a strong dose of, a large number of things which should be represses, being 'a series of confidences, rather shameful, that one is honor-bound not to reveal.'[12]

Both the reader and Lowell himself, coming from a whole poetic generation influenced by psychoanalysis, both wittingly and unwittingly will enact and reenact Freudian scenarios combining the private and the public, the obsession with official history, family history and trauma and the acting out, working through strategies meant to deal with what Caruth calls 'unclaimed experience.' It will be through special forms of transference that Lowell will reenact in various ways, in compulsive, obsessive ways an Oedipal scene of rebellion and violence, followed and completed mainly by expressions of weakness and vulnerability, thus defying the masculine stereotypes[13] of the patriarchal society in which he lived. The troubled, traumatic relationship with the authority of the family past as part of America's history is a love-hate relationship in many of Lowell's poems. At times, as in 'For the Union Dead,' the poetic persona appears to revere the past, seen in relation to the unheroic present and its terrible problems, racism and corruption featuring prominently as representations of present-day Boston. There is a dramatic opposition between this and the heroic past, woven in a poem celebrating aspects of both family history and American history in this post-*Life Studies* poem[14], 'For the Union Dead.'

In this poem, the pathetic father figure associated with Commander Lowell is replaced by the figure of a young and glamorous Civil War hero, Colonel Gould Shaw. The young Boston

[11] Lowell Hall at Harvard University is named after another illustrious family member, A. Lawrence Lowell, President of the university (1909-1933).
[12] M.L. Rosenthal. *The Modern Poets.* New York: OUP, 1965 (1960): 231.
[13] 'Tamed by Miltown, we lie on Mother's bed,' the pathetic persona (Lowell himself?) claims in the first line of 'Man and Wife.'
[14] Lowell had initially included the poem in Life Studies, then he realized that it marked a significant shift in his poetry and left it as central to the next volume, to which it also gave its name.

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Brahmin hero had died at the head of his regiment of African American soldiers. Now his monument is seen as anachronistic in the middle of an urban Boston environment which shows vivid illustrations of bribery and corruption, in the poet's opinion. Ruthless commercialism and the accompanying moral degradation of the city[15] are memorably sketched in the last sentence of the poem, which shows what the image of the giant-finned cars of the city's business people, the American Irish *nouveaux riches*, amounts to: "a savage servility/ slides by on grease"(*Collected Poems*: 378).

If, on a public level, the poem appears to show Lowell's engagement with pressing contemporary issues, announcing a significant departure from a certain solipsism associated with some of the excesses of his engagement with personal and family taboo subjects, at least in the opinion of some (see Rosenthal above), the text as a literary 'message' may be seen as an act of 'artistic rebellion' against one of his two already mentioned literary fathers. Allen Tate had written his famous 'Ode to the Confederate Dead.' His response to 'father' Tate is twofold, in terms of both 'anxiety of influence theory' and also in terms of Northern vs Southern attitudes to race issues. With his 'To the Union Dead,' in addition to a response to Tate's ode to the South and to its heroes, Lowell also engages with the urgency of the racial issues that had already become very visible in America at the time of the Civil Rights movement.

Like Lowell, Sylvia Plath engages with authority figures inspired by a Freudian scenario, but in significantly different circumstances. Like Lowell in relation to his main literary father figures, Allen Tate and T.S. Eliot and their attending Modernist mode, in addition to other authority figures (his real father, his impressive family history, the American Puritan tradition as a whole), Sylvia Plath has her own 'daddies' to deal with. The first authority figure as far as poetry goes is, arguably, Robert Lowell himself. Like Ann Sexton and W.D. Snodgrass, Plath had been Lowell's student at the time. Diane Wood Middlebrook first sees what all these poets had in common rather than a possible relationship based on rivalry and anxiety of influence. What is particularly significant is that they are brought together by a common interest in psychoanalysis:

> Lowell was the teacher and mentor of Snodgrass, Sexton, and Plath, who also knew each other's work very well. Second, they had all been through psychological breakdowns and treatment, following rather early marriages. Third, all four poets had become parents—of daughters, as it happens—not long before writing their confessional poems. Finally, they understood the dynamics of family life in terms of Freudian psychoanalysis.[16]

However, unlike Snodgrass and most of the 'confessional Lowell' of the 1959 volume, *Life Studies*, in spite of the tragic death that encouraged many critics to see her as a helpless victim, the Plath of *Ariel* can be seen as a defiant rebel, coping with trauma and authority figures in literary games going beyond confession and engaging in complex constructions in which the persona achieves at times mythical stature. Such a view is supported by critics who have followed a different interpretation of Plath's poems from that of the initially confessional readings. 'Initiatory' Jon Rosenblatt, not 'confessional' M.L. Rosenthal, is one of those who sees Plath's engagement with traumatic experience in terms of strong, defiant engagement: 'More successfully than any other recent American poet, Sylvia Plath dramatized those moments of crisis during which the self must choose between life and death. By using intensely personal material, she gave concrete form to an action involving violent self-transformation and initiatory change.[17]

Some of the most critical episodes in Sylvia Plath's life had to do with a series of strong authority figures, Robert Lowell, considering the confessional persona he had adopted at the time he

[15] Significantly, Brahmin, upper-class Lowell this time sides with the aristocratic, although enlightened past of his Puritan ancestors, in opposition to what he sees as the corrupt, Irish Catholic rulers of his contemporary Boston.
[16] D.W. Middlebrook "What Was Confessional Poetry?" *The Columbia History of American Poetry*. Eds. Brett C. Millier, and Jay Parini. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993: 636.
[17] Rosenblatt, Jon. "Sylvia Plath: The Drama of Initiation." *Twentieth Century Literature*. Vol.25:1 (Spring, 1979) p. 21.

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was teaching his confessional disciples, being out of that range. The first of these is usually seen as her father, Otto Plath, the last being her poetic rival and estranged husband, Ted Hughes.
Throughout her short but tumultuous life, Plath had shown her ambivalent attitude to such figures, with whom she sees herself engaged in dynamic, dramatic situations. This can be seen in notes made in her journal a whole decade before she gained artistic prominence: 'Do I want to crawl into the gigantic paternal embrace of a mental colossus? A little, maybe, I'm not sure.'[18] These words seem to foreshadow the central confrontation between the artistic persona and the formidable, forbidding male figure at the center of her first volume of poetry, *The Colossus*. In the journal, however, Sylvia has in mind neither her father nor Ted Hughes, but one of her boyfriends at that time, Myron Lotz.

Since her father's death when she was a child, Sylvia will enact, act out, work through, a half-real, half-imaginary, memorably imagined, father-daughter relationship, in which obsessive, compulsive repetitions in all forms and guises is one of the defining coordinates. The most shocking, if read as straightforward confession, is Sylvia Plath's poem, 'Daddy,' but a more comprehensive poetic texture and framework, featuring a whole series of other texts, would be necessary in a longer essay than this, in order to describe the author's strategy of exorcising her demons and getting them to work for her in her confrontation with both trauma and with artistic influence and posterity.

'Daddy, I have had to kill you./ You died before I had time' (Hughes 222[19]), the speaker shockingly says at the beginning of Plath's famous poem. This fictional voice is supported by that of Sylvia herself, speaking with a friend about Otto Plath, her father: 'I adored and despised him, and I probably wished many times that he were dead. When he obliged me and died, I imagined that I had killed him.'[20] Otto had been born in 1885, and had married Aurelia Schober when he was almost 47 (his wife was 21 younger than him). A German, he had come to America at the beginning of the 20th century and had worked hard to assert himself in his country of adoption. He was an entomologist who wrote his doctoral thesis on bumblebees (who will resurface in some of Sylvia's best *Ariel* poems) and became a university professor.

A dedicated academic putting a lot of effort in his work, Otto was brought down by the combination of work and bad health. He would only be strong enough to see his children for about 20 minutes each evening. Sylvia (Sivvy) and Warren, her younger brother, would tell him what they had done at school, would recite poems and tell stories. The relationship was solemn and formal, the children had to show their achievements rather than express affection. Otto's death in 1940 was the main event of Sylvia's childhood. Eight-year-old Sylvia felt abandoned by her parent. Her sense of self was severely damaged. Later, she would depict her father as an autocrat that she had revered and had been in awe of. In her adult life she would look for strong masculine figures that would replace in her inner world what she pictured in retrospect (and probably as a result of her familiarity with Freud's theory as well) the vanished colossus of her childhood. Was the representation of austere, authoritarian, oppressive father figures in her poetry an illustration of autobiographic material shaped as confessionalism or was it more than that?

A simplistic Freudian reading of such poems as Daddy would cast the author as the very persona of the poem (author as speaker), an individual still haunted by a traumatic experience from childhood, a patient or victim in a Freudian psychoanalytic script, in which the father figure is … Otto Plath himself. However, there is evidence that Sylvia, who had developed in interest in psychology and psychoanalysis (she even considered doing a PhD in the field) discovered the creative potential of a traumatic and dramatic daughter-father relationship both as an analysand (after her suicide attempt at 21) and as an apprentice analyst. There is even more evidence that processes of transference can be traced in the opposite direction as far as remembered, evoked,

[18] Qtd. in L. Wagner-Martin. *Sylvia Plath: A Biography.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987, p.94.
[19] Grimly ironically, one of the two daddy figures is the editor of Plath's collected poems, Ted Hughes himself.
[20] Qtd. in D. Perkins .590.

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imagined traumatic experiences are concerned. Thus, instead of Sylvia or her poetic persona taking it out on another male figure (Ted Hughes?) as a traumatic consequence of the psychic damaged caused by Otto, one can safely imagine the opposite move.

In 'Daddy,' the authority figure is first seen as 'a black shoe' in which the persona has lived 'like a foot, for thirty years' (confessional feature: Sylvia is turning thirty when she writes the poem). The speaker claims she has had to kill 'daddy,' while immediately cloaking the father figure in a hyperbolic mantle. He is 'marble-heavy, a bag full of God/ Ghastly statue with one gray toe/ Big as a Frisco seal'(222). This is more reminiscent of the giant figure of the Colossus, another authority figure, which, in the eponymous volume, had stood for some form of oppressive patriarchal poetic tradition from which the young poet is trying to break free ('anxiety of influence' again?). What is more, the father figure is also reminiscent of another figure from 'Full Fathom Five.' Like in that poem, the 'daddy' here is pictured as a drowned figure, 'a head in the freakish Atlantic/ Where it pours bean green over blue/ in the waters off beautiful Nauset' (Ibid.). Again, it reminds one less of Otto Plath than of the eerie presence of the drowned sailor at the beginning of Robert Lowell's 'The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket.'

The speaker claims she had tried to bring the father figure from the past, this time in the shape of a horrible Nazi apparition.[21] Then, in a gesture that many 'genuine Jews' and militant feminists found scandalous, the speaker imagines herself a Jew in a concentration camp loving her Aryan, blue-eyed tormentor: 'Every woman adores a Fascist/ The boot in the face, the brute/ Brute heart of a brute like you'(223). Immediately afterward, one sees the image of the real daddy, standing at the blackboard, a picture that Sylvia had, and is still known, of a cleft-chinned, blue-eyed father of German descent, having had nothing to do with Nazi Germany and its horrors. An apparently confusing juxtaposition of daddy images - the oppressive black shoe, the drowned figure, apparently drawn from Lowell's poem, the Eichmann figure, the swastika, the violent Fascist - is then led to final resolution. This is not a poem about malevolent, patriarchal figures shaped on the father figure, but a shocking response to the trauma caused by someone that the speaker (Sylvia?) has made a model of in terms of what father figures might stand for: 'a man in black with a Meinkampf look/ And a love of the rack and the screw'(224). If one is still uncertain who this man might be, the speaker adds, 'And I said I do, I do.' She had said, 'I do' on June 16th, 1956, to Ted Hughes.

Seven years later, Sylvia's runaway husband and her poetic rival was trying to break free, in an anxiety of influence attitude, from the 'gentility' of contemporary poetry in the form of Philip Larkin. Now Sylvia does not pose as victim, but as a powerful and wicked witch[22] who has ritually killed her enemy and her rival, who had assumed the father figure role for a while: 'If I've killed a man, I've killed two -/ The vampire who said he was you/ And drank my blood for a year,/ Seven years, if you want to know'(224).

Like Lowell's, Sylvia's poetry may be seen as confessional in the shaping of her own brand of a 'degraded brand of Romanticism, placing the sensitivity of the poet at the center of concern'(Molesworth 163). The sensitivity is there all right, but the ways they deal with trauma appear to be very different. Unlike Lowell who, in such poems as 'Commander Lowell' and 'Man and Wife' assumes an unconventionally vulnerable role in his engagement with traumatic experiences, Sylvia Plath plays the female warrior, the ritualistic killer of the father figure in Daddy, part of a longer series of poem dramatizing the father-daughter relationship, in an attempt at achieving a sort of artistic detachment from the traumatic experience which is enacted and reenacted in a variety of situations, throughout the poems in *The Colossus* and *Ariel*.

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[21] The trial and execution of 'daddy' Adolf Eichmann (June 1962) was still fresh in the public space in October of the same year, when Plath wrote the poem.

[22] In his *Sylvia Plath: Method and Madness* (xi) Edward Butscher refers to the poet as 'bitch goddess,' at the risk of disconcerting some sensitive readers then and controversies over politically correct language nowadays.

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