



The Return of the Oppressed: A Postcolonial Reading in Selected Poems

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Annotation: This study focused on postcolonial concepts and their application to three poems. The first poem, *Daddy*, by the poet Sylvia Plath applied to three concepts of post-colonialism: othering, slavery, and allegory. The concept of “othering” has been discussed psychologically and socially as its impact on the female in the poem. The female could not express her opinion or speak, creating a social lack. On the psychological level, the female suffered greatly leading her to describe her father and husband as vampires. It is obvious to see psychological damage in how the female describes the other men in the poem. The second concept in the poem *Daddy* is slavery, as it is important to highlight the oppression that women are subjected to by men. The female in the poem suffered greatly due to being the victim of brutal treatment by the father and relatively less than the husband. In *Daddy* poem, the concept of allegory links the treatment of the father and husband to the female to what happened to the Jews at his Hellacost altar. Plath clearly states that patriarchy and Nazism are two sides of the same coin. The second poem is *The Stolen Child* by W. B. Yeats, where the concept of “place” was applied. Yeats’ place concept revolves around Ireland, depicting the countryside and nature, connecting Irish people to their original culture. The third poem is by Yeats, *The Fisherman*, to which the concept of Nationalism is applied, as Yeats always tries to declare his purpose for the Irish nation. Yeats searches for a true Irish identity that involves everyone and embraces the ancient Celtic. He kept his cultural origins, highlighting Irish myths and models.

Keywords: The Oppressed, Postcolonialism, Othering, Slavery, Allegory, place, Nationalism.

Introduction

Postcolonial concepts are important for analyzing literary texts, as they help reach conclusions that facilitate the work of researchers in general. Postcolonial theory has useful in questioning colonial relations. Postcolonialism occasionally uses temporality to indicate the direct time after imperial authorities were removed from their colonial empires. It is unnecessary to include postcolonialism, colonized, and colonizer, but rather include all kinds of persecution, ignorance, or imposing control with knowledge or without knowledge. An example is the concept of slavery and Allegory in the *Daddy* poem. In my own opinion, theorists generally use postcolonial concepts as tools to communicate their ideas. The concepts serve as the key to understanding postcolonial theory more smoothly and clearly. Hence, postcolonial concepts play an important role in defining and analyzing ideas.

Daddy

Daddy is assumed to be one of Plath’s most famous poems, published in 1962. The poem describes the male domination over women while, at the same time, it is fiercely critical of patriarchy. There is a wide debate between supporters and opponents about this poem, but it is considered the best example of confessional poetry. Plath wrote the poem a few months before her suicide, as the poem includes Plath’s personal and historical life. The main factor in writing the poem is the result of



Plath's persecution, to a greater extent by her father, Otto Plath, and to a lesser extent by her husband, Ted Hughes. Otto Plath emigrated from Poland to America, where he was a professor at Boston University. He died because of diabetes illness, and that happened when Plath was only nine years old.

Plath mixes persecution and the Holocaust as she portrays the brutality to which males subjected her. The Holocaust is not a coincidence, as during the Plath study period, where who discussed the topic of the Holocaust in particular in linking it to political events. Plath was in England in 1962; she witnessed the publicity for the Eichmann trial. Plath also got to know Gerry and Jillian Becker, where she became convinced that the Jews and the Japanese are the victims of modern life. Perhaps the reason for Plath's suicide can be found in this poem shortly after it was written. Despite her struggles, Plath is less interested in her experience and does not reveal herself, which adds mystery. It seems the only way to make her voice heard through the poem is to escape from brutal and masculine control.

Othering in *Daddy* poem

The term "othering" has many meanings within it, but what matters in my study is controlling one group over another group, socially and psychologically. Gayatri Spivak first coined the term "othering". She defines it as "a dialectical process because the colonizing other is established at the same time as its colonized others are produced as subjects." (Ashcroft et al., 2013, p.188) The female in the poem faced great social problems, as shown below:

So I never could tell where you

Put your foot, your foot,

I never could talk to you.

The tongue stuck in my jaw.

It stuck in barb wire snare.

Ich, ich, ich, ich,

I could hardly speak.

I thought every German was you.

And the language obscene

An engine, an engine (Plath, & Hughes, 1981, p.223).

The female could not express her opinion or speak, creating a big social gap. The father's persecution of the girl caused a shake in her confidence, as we can see her hatred for him. It seems that what surrounds the female is hatred, disgust, and persecution, as she is the victim of a brutal father. However, the female tries to express her feelings, but the father is so wild that he does not accept her. On the psychological level, the matter is no less than social, as the female suffered greatly, and the situation reached her as she wished death to her father and her husband, as shown below in this stanza:

If I've killed one 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 (Plath, & Hughes, 1981, p.224).



Plath shows how bad their psychological condition is after being subjected to frequent persecution by her father and husband in the previous lines. She describes them as vampires who have sucked from her blood for many years, which indicates serious psychological damage. Plath describes many strong words in the poem towards father and husband, such as “you bastard” and “fat black heart,” as the female’s suffering psychologically. In many aspects, Othering appears in female subjugation. She has been abused psychologically and socially by her father and her husband.

Slavery in *Daddy* poem

The poem is about a woman exposed to domination by two men. The concept of slavery in the poem *Daddy* is evident through the father’s persecution of his daughter. In *can the subaltern speak*, Gayatri Spivak wonders if the follower has a voice to defend himself (2003, p.45). What reveals Plath’s anger at her father in her poem illustrates the psychological damage she suffers. In the poem *Daddy*, she describes the woman as a Jew and, simultaneously, a victim because of the German. The father’s brutal treatment reflects slavery, which causes the female to be unable to communicate:

So I never could tell where you

Put your foot, your foot,

I never could talk to you.

The tongue stuck in my jaw.

It stuck in barb wire snare.

Ich, ich, ich, ich,

I could hardly speak.

I thought every German was you.

And the language obscene

An engine, an engine

Chuffing me off like a Jew (Plath, & Hughes, 1981, p.223).

Plath’s fear is illustrated by the violent treatment of the Nazi father, as Plath is unable to talk with him, and the reason is the terrible German language. She does not mean identifying the German language as horrible but referring to the Germans’ atrocities in World War II. The German word “ic” is unclear, making the girl fearful of communicating with her father. This strange language and the use of terrible words make the girl in great horror, especially the word “ich.” The girl does not have good memories; on the contrary, she appears confused and lacks freedom because she is stuck in her father’s “oe”:

You do not do, you do not do.

Any more, black shoe

In which I have lived like a foot

For thirty years, poor and white,

Barely daring to breathe or Achoo (Plath, & Hughes, 1981, p.222).

This girl is trapped and “barely” able to “breathe” because her father treats her as a slave. The female feels upset, which leads her to turn to her world, through which she expresses her pent-up feelings. Thus, the “black shoe” symbolizes the oppression to which the daughter was subjected. The father is called evil about his hatred of the Nazis and the darkness that the father represents.



The Father is the source of evil, making the girl suffer woes and breaking her heart. The father was not the only persecutor but also her husband, Ted Hughes, who insulted her greatly. She explains the humiliation her husband subjected her to for seven years. Even worse, she found out about her husband's infidelity when he was calling another woman. In this stanza, she declares victory over patriarchy:

If I've killed one 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.

Daddy, you can lie back now (Plath, & Hughes, 1981, p.224).

Plath here attempts to send a message that she has defeated the vampires. The vampires' intention is against her father, who tortured her for a long time, and her husband, who insulted her for seven years, which is her marriage duration. She talks to her father in the last line above, indicating that she has finally gained freedom and he will disappear from her memory forever.

Allegory in *Daddy* poem

In her poem *Daddy*, Plath metaphorically links the crimes of the Nazis, what they did to the Jews, and what the girl was subjected to by men. Plath clearly states that patriarchy and Nazism are two sides of the same coin, as the poem invokes all the persecuted rights, especially women.

Not God but a swastika

So black no sky could squeak through.

Every woman adores a Fascist,

The boot in the face, the brute

Brute heart of a brute like you (Plath, & Hughes, 1981, p.223).

In these lines above, the black sky of death represents the control that obstructs the sky, as the sky symbolizes women for their free choice and will. The strong control in society led to the adaptation of women and the acceptance of many women's situations, which led to the point being made of their love for fascism. The spiritual damage the female suffers is great, leading to psychological problems. Spiritual death is what happened here, where the poem mainly calls for considering the arbitrary persecution of women. The female in the poem seems to think she is a Jew: "I began to talk like a Jew. / I think I may well be a Jew." And she began to present herself as a Jew. Also, the common characteristic between what happened to the Jews and women is the stripping of their identity. The submission of women and Jews is a metaphor for Plath in this poem. Considering women unfit to think or act and stripping them of their identity leads women to search for an imaginary world to escape reality.

William Yeats

Yeats is an Irish poet and dramatist. Yeats wrote the first poem in 1882, *The Island of Statues*. Yeats, in 1882, began a passion for reading Irish poets and Gaelic sagas, and he began concentrating his poetry on Irish subjects. Yeats first collected Poems in 1895, and he was in London then. He published *The Stolen Child* poem in 1889, one of his noble poems. Furthermore, to be one of the greatest romantic poets, he is also one of the central figures of 20th-century literature. He is regarded as the developer of the Renaissance progression of Irish literature. Yeats died in France in 1939, and World War II started. Many of the Anglo-Irish minority estimate



themselves English characters who appeared to have been born in Ireland, but Yeats staunchly insisted on his Irish nationality. Yeats kept his cultural origins, highlighting Irish myths and models in several poems. Despite related forms from everyday life and common customs, many of Yeats' poetry and countless of his poetry remained to show his concern for Irish subjects.

Throughout the 1890s, he frequently converted concerned with poetic methods. Yeats, in 1890, supported obtaining the "Rhymers Club," a club of London authors that gathered to examine and review their poems. The club's impact is indicated in the lush density of Yeats's poetry, especially at that time. In the last years of Yeats's life, Ireland was not in good condition as it was full of internal strife. Especially with Yeats's old age, Ireland's change angered him greatly as the Anglo-Irish Protestant minority lost its dominance over the country. Yeats tried to communicate local interests and their change towards a global language in his poems as much as possible.

The stolen child

Yeats included *The Stolen Child* in the book of poems called *Crossways*. The poem observes the tales of Ireland, which is the central subject that Yeats loves to cover. The poem is based on an Irish legend, conceded as a ballad poem. The poem's event concerns a set of fairies and attracts a child off from his place to a fairy world. Regarding the literary context, Yeats was influenced by the Romantic era because his poem deals with nature and folklore. The key concern of *The Stolen Child* is the presentation of the supernatural's fairyland, and there is a conflict because the supernatural is at once attractive and seems dangerous at the same time.

Place in *The Stolen child*

The concept of place is fundamental to Yeats. Ireland is the Irish's motherland, especially the countryside, where Yeats stressed the importance of place and nature that constitute the Irish's identity. "One of the deepest reasons for the significance of place in colonized societies lies in the disruptions caused by modernity [...]." (Ashcroft et al., 2013, p.197). Ireland to Yeats lies in the wonderful traditions, beliefs, and folklore. Yeats describes Ireland as identified by its nature and its fairyland. He shows that Irish culture is different from British culture, as he strengthens it after he has supported it. Yeats exposes the worldly public's existence, which is "full of troubles/ And is anxious in its sleep." Yeats highlights that colonialism brings nothing but misery and suffering. Besides, he mocks colonialism in the previous line. In confronting and abstaining at the same time.

Come away, O human child!

To the waters and the wild

With a faery, hand in hand.

For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand. (Finneran, 1991, p.17)

Fairies call the child to come to join the fairy's island. Yeats here refers to the Irish people as the child reflects people living in a world full of sadness and tears. Yeats shows his love for his country and his place. He calls on the Irish people to leave the colonial cities neglected by the colonial culture, return to the original Irish countryside, and reinforce their culture with nature. Yeats is a role model for his mature idea, his love for his culture, and its defence.

The fisherman

Through the poem, Yeats depicts culture, ancestors, origins, and the connection linking Irish personalities and nature. The poem shapes the image of a romantic man, and this image is included in the *Fisherman* as a symbol. This simple poem helps Yeats exemplify the simplicity included in the man he is portraying. Thus, the poem's form indicates the meaning that Yeats is attempting to



achieve by applying the figure of the Fisherman. The Fisherman would be a man who perfectly matches the country's landscape, connected with his roots and nature.

Nationalism in *the fisherman*

The concept of nationalism is important to Yeats, and his object to building nationalism is central to the classical Celtic myths. According to Ernest Renan: "nations are not 'natural' entities and the instability of the nation is the inevitable consequence of its nature as a social construction" (Ashcroft et al., 2013, p.167). Yeats always tries to declare his purpose for the Irish nation, as reflected in the Fisherman poem. His attempts met tangible impudence in his country Ireland as this Celticism faced a competing and more dominating custom. Yeats attempts to draw recognition to his people for building an entire nation which can stand again. He searches for a true Irish identity that involves everyone and embraces the ancient Celtic. In this poem, Yeats shows that Irish people isolate themselves from their Ireland history and Celtic origins. He believes that a united Irish home for all no longer exists and shows sympathy and regret. Yeats explains that there is one last hope that is not clear in this first stanza:

Although I can see him still—

The freckled man who goes

To a gray place on a hill

In gray Connemara clothes

At dawn to cast his flies—

It's long since I began

To call up to the eyes

This wise and simple man. (Finneran, 1991, p.145)

There is a feeling of optimism that can still see in the first line. The third line can give imagery illustrating his country, which has a natural sense. Yeats describes Ireland as rainy and misty, forming the greyness that contains his Ireland. He is describing the nature of Ireland, referring to the nation that no longer exists. Also, he refers to Celtic roots as an image, but again it is about to vanish. He describes the simple Irish man with wisdom, referring to the grandparents as the new generation demands a return to their ancestry. Yeats is a tough Irish included in the Irish matter, and he desires his people to realize the value of their country.

Conclusion

The concepts of colonialism can be seen in both Sylvia Plath's and W. B. Yeats's poems. In Plath's *Daddy*, The female cannot articulate herself or speak, resulting in a significant social divide. The girl's faith is shaken by her father's oppression, as shown by her contempt towards him. Since she is the victim of a brutal father, the female appears surrounded by hate, disgust, and persecution. On the other hand, the female attempts to express her emotions but her father are so irrational that she cannot do so. Hence, Othering is a colonial concept that appears in the previous condition. The concept of slavery also appears as The Nazi father's abusive treatment exemplifies Plath's terror, as Plath cannot communicate with him due to the terrible German language. In the poem, the father is the root of all evil, causing the girl to suffer misfortunes and break her heart. Not only is her father a persecutor, but so is her husband, who constantly insults her. In addition, the black sky of death reflects the oppression that obstructs the sky, representing women's freedom of choice and will. The strong influence of society causes women to conform and embrace their circumstances, which contributes to the argument being made about their love for fascism. The female suffers significant



spiritual damage, which contributes to psychological issues. Women seek an imaginary world to avoid reality after being deemed unfit to think or act and stripped of their identity, which shows Allegory's concept.

On the other hand, in W. B. Yeats Fisherman, the concept of Nationalism appears. The poet attempts to raise consciousness among the Irish people about the importance of re-establishing a valid country. He seeks a real Irish identity that celebrates the ancient Celtic and includes all. In this poem, Yeats depicts the isolation of Irish people from one another and their separation from their ancestors and Celtic roots. Also, the concept of place is seen in Yeats's poetry. Since Ireland is the Irish motherland, the idea of place is fundamental to Yeats, particularly in the countryside, where Yeats emphasized the importance of place and nature, informing the Irish identity. Thus, this idea is expressed fully in the stolen child.

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