



Trauma and SelfReconciliation in Bishop's and Plath's Selected Poems

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المستخلص

من بين الشعراء الأمريكيين المعاصرين، تتمتع إليزابيث بيشوب (1911- 1979) وسيلفيا بلاث (1932- 1963) بأسلوب شعري خاص. في شعر القرن العشرين، اتسمت أساليب بيشوب وبلاث بالصدمة والكآبة. تشتهر كلا الشاعرتين بكتابة قصائد عن حياتهما الشخصية ومعاناتهما. يكشف هذا البحث كيفية تكيف الشاعرتان مع الصدمات التي مرت بهن، مما ساعدهن على التصالح مع ذاتهما وقبول الصدمات والألام كواقع يجب التأقلم معه - بل وعلي حب الصدمات والأستفاده منها. يقيم هذا البحث العلاقة بين الصدمة والأدب، استنادا إلى تعريف سيغموند فرويد للصدمة. يهدف البحث إلى فهم شعر بيشوب وبلاث على نطاق أوسع وأعمق يتجاوز النظر إليهما على أنهما مجرد تجارب شخصية أو فردية مؤلمة وإنما يعتبر شعرهم دعوه لكل قارئ لكي يتأقلم علي الصدمات والألام و يتوقع حدوثها برضا ومحبه وإيماناً من الفرد بأن الحياة لا تخلو من الصدمات والكبد- فكما قالت بيشوب في قصيدة "فنا واحدا" علي الانسان ان يعتاد علي صدمات فقد الاشياء التافهه الصغيره حتي يؤهل نفسه للصدمات الأكبر في الحياة.

الكلمات المفتاحية

بيشوب , بلاث , فرويد , كاثي كاروث, الصدمة , الكآبة , التصالح مع النفس , قبول الأمر الواقع

Abstract

Among modern American poets, Elizabeth Bishop (1911- 1979) and Sylvia Plath (1932- 1963), are endowed with a special poetic style. Within the poetry of the twentieth century, Bishop's and Plath's styles are characterized by melancholy, trauma, and gloom. Both poets are famous for writing poems about their personal life and suffering. This paper reveals how both poets identify themselves with trauma, which helps in their self-reconciliation. The paper establishes a relationship between trauma, and literature, based on Sigmund Freud's definition of trauma. The research aims at understanding Bishop's and Plath's poetry on a deeper broader scale beyond viewing them as simply personal or individual traumatic experiences.

Keywords: Sylvia Plath, Elizabeth Bishop, Freud, Caruth, trauma, reconciliation, and psychological development

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Selected Poems

Among modern American poets, Elizabeth Bishop (1911- 1979) and Sylvia Plath (1932- 1963), are endowed with a special poetic style. Within the poetry of the twentieth century, Bishop's and Plath's styles are characterized by melancholy, trauma, and gloom. Both poets are famous for writing poems about their personal life and suffering. This paper reveals how both poets identify themselves with trauma, which helps in their self-reconciliation. The paper establishes a relationship between trauma, and literature, based on Sigmund Freud's definition of trauma. The research aims at understanding Bishop's and Plath's poetry on a deeper broader scale beyond viewing them as simply personal or individual traumatic experiences.

Trauma in literature, is one of the basic concepts Sigmund Freud elaborates in his book *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1933), lecture 18, entitled Fixation to Traumas—the Unconscious, Freud writes

traumatic neuroses are not in their essence the same thing as the spontaneous neuroses which we are in the habit of investigating and treating by analysis...The traumatic neuroses give a clear indication that a fixation to the moment of the traumatic accident lies at their root (314-315).

Freud explains that traumatic neuroses take place when a flashback of past painful memories occurs to the mind as if they are happening now; "lie(s) at their root". The significance of trauma lies in its power to stick to the deep



layers of memory. Freud comments on this saying that "it may happen, too that a person is brought so completely to a stop by a traumatic event which shatters the foundations of his life that he abandons all interest in the present and future and remains permanently absorbed in mental concentration upon the past" (316). Freud states that some people suffer from trauma to the extent of being imprisoned in the past experiences, refusing to live new experiences of the present and the future. In his book *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature Legacies of Survival and Perpetration* (2006), Erin McGlothlin says "For Freud, trauma makes itself known in the patient by its unsummoned, recurring presence long after the traumatic event is over" (52). This is exactly the case in the poetry of Bishop and Plath. To elaborate, both poets suffer from trauma after the traumatic experiences are over. Their poetry depends mainly on memories; and repetitive flashbacks. Trauma "which is derived from the Greek 'trauma', meaning 'wound', can be either a body injury produced by violence, or a startling experience which has a lasting effect on mental life... The person may suffer from a variety of repetitive symptoms, including flashbacks" (McGlothlin, 52). Bishop's and Plath's poems in this paper, demonstrate the presence of trauma depending mainly on flashbacks, and memories that attack the mind, a long period after the traumatic experience is over.

In her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narratives and History* (1996), Cathy Caruth explains trauma based on Freud's concept of "injurious repetitions", commenting that,

It is the moving quality of this literary story, I would suggest—its striking juxtaposition of the unknowing, injurious

repletion and the witness of the crying voice—that best represents Freud's intuition of, and his passionate fascination with, traumatic experiences. If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing (3).

This comment sheds light on the importance of psychoanalysis in understanding literature. Caruth believes that literature of trauma investigates the impact of trauma on characters and contexts. She thinks, like Freud, that literature of traumatic experiences analyzes the effect of traumatic neuroses on the psychological behavior of individuals and characters. Trauma in literature is significant as it sheds light on the role that memory plays in shaping present and future, and personal identities as well. In other words, trauma depends mainly on flashes of memories, recollected in human mind and reproduced later on irregular basis.

Bishop's three poems "Sestina" (1965), "One Art" (1976), and "First Death in Nova Scotia" (1965), explore the theme of trauma that comes out of psychological calamities. The poet does not simply expose her readers to the problem, she, however, gives some suggestions and resolutions, as exemplified in her poem One Art. Like Elizabeth Bishop, Sylvia Plath also establishes her own doctrine of trauma, and art. She is able through her poems "The Colossus of Rhodes" (1960), "Getting There" (1965), and "Daddy" (1962), to embody her personal experience of trauma, turning it into art, to make up for her loss through reaching a resolution of her



climax; that is accepting death as a means of regeneration and rebirth.

Both poets tried, through their poetry, to re-envision and retrieve the presence of their lost dead beloved icons as an attempt to make up for their loss. Through their poems, Bishop and Plath talk about trauma that is turned into drama, aiming at achieving self-reconciliation. In other words, they reconcile themselves through accepting the loss of minor things, as a preparation bigger losses.

Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979), as an American poet and writer, living with her aunt after the death of her father and the mental sickness of her mother, was introduced, by her aunt, to the Victorian poets like Alfred Tennyson, Thomas Carlyle, and Robert Browning. As a very weak child, Bishop received little formal education. However, she entered college in 1929, where she studied music and English. She travelled to many cities as reflected in her poems. She stayed in Brazil for fifteen years where she studied English and American language and literature. Then she returned to the United States where she lectures in the University of Washington, Harvard and New York. Bishop died in 1979 and her name was dedicated for her memory.

As for her literary career, Elizabeth Bishop lived commuting between different houses, which made her feel a guest in life all the time. This is reflected in her writings and poems as she wrote impersonal poetry. Bishop wrote very general poems that mostly detail lives of all readers. However, deep down in her writings, Bishop was always referring to herself, searching for her lost identity. She confesses her deep sad unsaid emotions and feelings to her readers. Perhaps this makes her belong to the confessional poets of English literature. Publishing 101 poems, Bishop's

writings are marked by a description of the physical outer world, but on a deeper level, her major recurrent theme is about her struggle to find belonging and relief; it is a quest for self-reconciliation, which is best expressed through human experiences of traumatic neuroses and loss.

Losing her parents as a child, Bishop is able, through her poetry, to represent three phases of her life: the unstable childhood, her loneliness, and her reconciliation with loss. These phases are shown to her readers through her confessional poetry. Confessional literature is defined by Richa Verma, as

a psychological analog which compels out attention to the problems of the writer on account of its reference to life and its challenges. A confessional poet passes through a chain of situations, acted upon by variety of forces, personal and impersonal, and becomes a complex figure usually preoccupied with extreme mental states (16).

Applying this definition to Bishop's poetry, it is evident that she belongs to confessional poets, since she, according to Verma, "passes through a chain of situations" that caused her trauma. As for the voices she adopts in her storytelling, they do correspond to Caruth's suggestion that "such a listening to the voice and to the speech delivered by the others' wound is what takes place, indeed, in Freud's own text, whose theory of trauma is written not only about but in the midst of trauma" (9). Bishop identifies herself with loss, in an attempt to confess her fragility and weakness as a human being. Bishop indirectly compares herself to other things and even objects, examining the similarities between herself and these objects.



It is through this comparison that the poet expresses her sense of trauma, suffering and un-belonging. This feeling is best reflected in her poem Sestina.

Sestina opens with rain fall:

September rain falls on the house.
 In the failing light, the old grandmother
 sits in the kitchen with the child
 beside the Little Marvel Stove,
 reading the jokes from the almanac,
 laughing and talking to hide her tears.

In his book *Elizabeth Bishop in the Twenty-First Century: Reading the New Edition*, Angus Cleghorn comments on Bishop's poem Sestina, saying that

while we cannot ignore the manifest biographical elements in the poem, Sestina is deeply involved with social critique. In this case, the "rigid house"—like the rigid form of the sestina itself—is emblematic of the rigid gender roles that the weeping grandmother, the man with "buttons like tears" and the child presumably endure due to social conventions that ultimately make of a home a virtual prison instead. ...As noted above, conventions both liberate and restrict the writer (221).

Cleghorn describes "Sestina" as a biographical poem that depicts Bishop's sadness and trauma. He thinks that Bishop is imprisoned in her unexplained feelings she had as a child. Her feelings are clearly reflected in everything around her to the extent that her "home is a virtual prison." There is a tender



moment where the grandmother and her grandchild, Bishop, are sitting together in the kitchen "beside the little Marvel stove". The scene is filled with the grandmother's melancholy. She pretends to be happy with her grandchild, however, there is still another feeling concealed. The jokes and laughter are ironically just to cover her tears. The little child Bishop can discover the "equinoctial tears" of the grandmother as "she thinks that her equinoctial tears/ and the rain that beats on the roof of the house/ were both foretold by the almanac/ but only known to a grandmother". The tears of the grandmother are traumatized and linked to the drops of water and the "hard tears" which "dance like mad on the hot black stove" (Sestina, line 15).

The inner tears of the grandmother are seen on her "teacup full of dark brown tears", reflecting the aftermath of Bishop's mother's loss. Bishop does not refer to herself only in this poem, however, she is becoming a general growing "voice" in modern times. In the above-mentioned image of the dancing tears, Bishop, the child, identifies herself with the dancing tears of the kettle and the dancing tears of the rain. The surrounding world is, in a sense, weeping. Janine Rogers comments on this image of the dancing tears, saying that

In her poem Sestina, Elizabeth Bishop constructs a haunting picture of the interactions between a grandmother and a grandchild on a gloomy autumn evening. The poem epitomizes the way that family members share long-buried and unarticulated sorrows, simultaneously hiding and revealing what they know of themselves and of each other (66).



living such as the house, the tea and the marvel stove are depicted and perceived differently in the poem. They represent vestiges of suffering and loss. Even water, the source of life, is associated with sadness, tears, and rigidity. In this context, Bloom comments that

Bishop's famous gift of observation is more than a habit of simply watching; it represents rather a certain self-conquest, the surmounting of a definite temperamental wariness. She is more naturally fastidious than rhapsodic... Her detachment is chronic, and yet the combination of attentiveness and precision which she brings to bear upon things is so intense that the detachment almost evaporates (25).

Bloom believes that Bishop excludes herself from the scene of the poem. She is detached from the events; she is a guest in this world. Both the reader and the poet are searching for themselves within the words and the images of the poem. They are facing general truths of human life through exploring the unknown poet's consciousness. *Sestina* attempts to subdue personal trauma, yet acknowledges it in a way that corresponds to the readers' own experiences, helping all readers to reconcile with their trauma and melancholy. Bishop has this ability to express these feelings of everyone's unexplained traumatic neuroses as she "reduces the externalized voice and schematizes from within the event-memory so that the narrator's and reader's identification with the child-beholder is complete" Costello, (198).

In her poem "One Art", published 1976, Bishop describes loss as an inevitable fact in human life. She explains how it is easy to "master" the experience of loss and



grief. In this poem, Bishop persuades her readers that losing simple and useless things in life is not but a preparation for people to lose bigger and greater things later. The six stanzas of the poem revolve around the same idea of accepting loss in our life, accommodating to it, reconciling with its consequences. The same topic is repeated in an attempt to convince readers that becoming an expert at losing things, one discovers that loss is not a catastrophe. Everything in human life is liable to be lost sooner or later. Bishop chooses to accommodate with crises and disasters of her life. In other words, not only does she acknowledge the transience of everything in life, but also she teaches her readers how to accept, and learn to lose. In the second stanza of *One Art*, Bishop says:

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.

The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Here the poet advises her readers to practice losing to get better at losing. She suggests trying to lose something every day. She starts with losing the "door keys", "places and names", "mother's watch", "loved houses", "cities", "two rivers", and "a continent", until you lose yourself;

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
the art of losing's not too hard to master
though it may look like (Write it!) like
disaster.

In her book *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Poetics of Loss*, Susan McCabe says "Bishop's *One Art*, in particular,

explores the concept of mastery and achieves a provisional, limited mastery" (252). According to McCabe, the poem starts with the declaration "the art of losing is not hard to master", which is repeated more than one time in the poem. Finally, the last decision of the poet is a little bit different as she discovers that "the art of losing is not too hard to master"; the poet tries to turn the idea of losing something into an art that can be mastered. "The one art may stand for the art of poetry...one art also stands for the art of letter writing" (Introduction VIII, Giroux). Giroux believes that the little One Art, is applicable for more than one thing in human life. Although the poem is an autobiography, it functions as a mirror that forces each reader to contemplate his or her own losses. Perhaps this is because the general word "one art" is a very loose term; that makes it liable for loss. Bishop expresses her traumatic neuroses as she experienced loss at a very young age; losing her father and mother. Later in her life, Elizabeth lost her lover as well. She succeeds in turning her trauma into art as she attempts to reject the severity of loss as if telling her readers, directly, through her poem "One Art", that since I can lose, you can lose as well, and since anything can be lost, trauma can be lost too.

Peter Robinson comments on the poem "One Art", saying that every loss in human life, is a loss of everything; it is a reminder of all losses:

One Art was composed in the autumn of 1975, during a temporary separation between the poet and her last companion, now executer, Alice Methfessel. However, this simply underlines that when it comes to losing people they are all one. Every loss and the subsequent crises associated with it, re-enacts earlier losses,



reawakens earlier fears of abandonment, loneliness and the old unsatisfactory means of coping with them (109).

Robinson believes that the addressed one in "One Art" is Alice Methfessel, Bishop's intimate friend. Bishop laments losing Alice, concluding the poem with addressing someone whose identity is unrevealed; "even losing you, I shan't have lied". Blair Mahoney writes that Bishop had "a traumatic upbringing, having been sent to live with her grandparents after her father died, and her mother was committed to a psychiatric institution" (98), which distinguishes her as a prolific writer. Again the rhymes "master", "faster", and "disaster", give the readers a sense of an obligatory speed. In other words, readers are forced to accept their loss of everything as quickly as they simply read these words. Doing this, Bishop reconciles with her losses and her trauma. She persuades her readers of this reconciliation as well.

Bishop's poem "First Death in Nova Scotia", published in "Questions of Travel 1965", is a five-stanza poem about the death of Arthur, Bishop's cousin in Nova Scotia, Canada. This poem is a direct reference to Bishop's own spiritual death, as a child.

In the cold, cold parlor
 my mother laid out Arthur
 beneath the chromographs:
 Edward, Prince of Wales,
 with Princess Alexandra,
 and King George with Queen Mary.
 Below them on the table

stood a stuffed loon
shot and stuffed by Uncle
Arthur, Arthur's father.

In this opening stanza of the poem, Bishop tells the story of her mother who has taken her to see the dead child Arthur, her cousin. As a little child, Bishop starts to observe everything in the room, describing the dead child as "all white, like a doll" (stanza four). In her book *God and Elizabeth Bishop: Meditations on Religion and Poetry*, Cheryl Walker comments on Bishop's traumatic neuroses saying:

Bishop's life kept confronting her with the seemingly inevitable conjunction between love and death. Sometimes it is hard to imagine how she could cope with all the deaths and losses she had to absorb, beginning, of course, with her father's death and her mother's deathlike disappearance. She later wrote about the deaths of cousin Arthur "*First Death in Nova Scotia*", and her friend Gwendolyn, both of which occurred during Bishop's childhood (29).

According to Walker, *First Death in Nova Scotia* is considered another poem of loss and trauma. Bishop of the poem was too young to understand the meaning of death. In portraying Arthur's body as "very small", "doll-like", and "tiny lily", with a coffin like a "little frosted cake", she dramatizes her trauma. She stresses the brutality of death, reminding all readers of its inevitability.

Arthur was very small.



He was all white, like a doll
 that hadn't been painted yet.
 Jack Frost had started to paint him
 the way he always painted
 the Maple Leaf (Forever).
 He had just begun on his hair,
 a few red strokes, and then
 Jack Frost had dropped the brush
 and left him white, forever.

Again in the fourth stanza, the poet dramatizes the scene through describing the poor child, whose reason for death is unknown. This is an indirect message to all readers that death can haunt anyone at any age. The child's being "shot and stuffed", in stanza first, is a connotation of the severity of death even with little helpless creatures.

Bishop's struggle in her poem "First Death in Nova Scotia", is a struggle of a different nature. To clarify, her struggle is not to accommodate with death and loss, it is, however, a struggle to state a meaning for death. She, as a child, compares the dead Arthur to "a doll", something she knows as a child. However, for an adult reader, the impression of the brutality and tyranny of death is strongly conveyed. Bishop is haunted by the memories of the past experience of Arthur's death. She has those flashbacks of Arthur's scene, as she cannot forget about her traumatic neuroses.

Consequently, the poem dramatizes a double tragedy: first, the tragedy of Arthur, the dead child, and second, the tragedy of the poet and her readers, the living souls. In fact,



the tragedy of the poet and her readers is the most serious since it is the tragedy of the "ambiguous loss", which Pauline Boss defines as "the most distressful of all losses, leading to symptoms that are not only painful, but often missed or misdiagnosed" (6). Boss continues his definition by dividing ambiguous loss into two types: "there are two basic kinds of ambiguous loss. In the first type, people are perceived by family members as physically absent but psychologically present, because it is unclear whether they are dead or alive...In the second type of ambiguous loss, a person is perceived as physically present but psychologically absent" (8-9). For Bishop, it is the tragedy of the physical absence and the psychological presence of Arthur, and her parents. Even if this "first death" is not completely understood by the poet, at that time, but it forms the base of her traumatic neuroses later in her life. Elaine Showalter believes that, like "Sestina", "First Death in Nova Scotia", is written from a child's point of view, exploring the child's feelings of confusion, trauma, and reconciliation. He states that:

Death becomes small, unreal but manageable, a landscape of reds and whites: Arthur's white face, the white loon with the desirable red glass eyes, Jack Frost painting, the Maple Leaf (forever)...The child's escape into fantasy resonates with adult knowledge. It is clearly the adult Elizabeth recalling the funeral scene. Again we encounter the difficult passage, never fully undertaken, from "infant sight" to "knowledge". Knowledge is always



and only tempered by innocence; as innocence is broken, though not dismissed by knowledge (17).

Knowledge, according to Showalter, is the first step towards realization and perception. Consequently, this perception leads ultimately to acceptance, submissiveness and reconciliation.

In fact, poems of Elizabeth Bishop prove that the best literature comes out of human trauma. Her suffering since her early childhood makes her a sensitive and emotional poet, writing poems that are read and loved till today. Bishop's Sestina, One Art and First Death in Nova Scotia, are psychological sketches of human life, dealing with losses in general. Actually, the attacks of the past memories, since causing harm to the psyche, are considered traumatic neuroses that result in a psychological literary work. Bishop's literary works depend on more than one psychological aspect. To clarify, her poetry deals with contradictions and paradoxes of human life. She is, according to Epstein, "rather than eliminating the personal entirely from her writing, Bishop's poetry was driven from the first by a complex interplay between revelation and concealment, self-disclosure and self-protection. Bishop's poems seem to thrive on this paradoxical mixture, which Bonnie Costello refers to as Bishop's Impersonal Personal" (93). It has often been noticed that Bishop's poetry is traumatic. However, this originally, as Epstein states, depends on her accurate interest in the paradoxes and calamities of human life. Since no one lives without losses and disappointments, her poetry touches and affects every reader.

Like Elizabeth Bishop, Sylvia Plath, according to Susan Bassnett "is one of the best known women writers of

the twentieth century... yet unlike those poets, whose international reputations were established during their lifetime, Plath's fame came more slowly, growing gradually after her death in 1963 to the point where, at the end of the century, she had acquired an almost mythical status, inspiring dozens of biographies, critical studies, memoirs" (1). Sylvia Plath, born in Boston 1932, and died in London 1963, is a confessional American poet, who excels in expressing her sense of alienation, self-destruction, and trauma. Plath was in a continuous state of inner war with herself; fighting and resisting her deep inner tortured self. Moreover, she struggled with severe depression that led to a period of psychiatric hospitalization and then to her suicide. Plath devoted her literary works to reconciliation and accommodation with the unwanted reality. Her traumatic neurosis, which resulted from her confusion, anxiety and doubt, is clearly embodied and presented in her poems; "confessional poetry experiences, reflecting more on autobiographical writing" (Richa Verma, 13).

The most distinctive feature about Plath's poetry is that her persona is granted a distinct voice; she is the third person narrator, separated from the poet herself. Also, the narrative voice is changeably personified; once as a listener, an audience, or even a mere careless hearer; all of whom do express and share Plath's traumatic experience, exploring how she, as a poet, through their voices, share her traumatic neuroses with them, making an imaginary indirect connection to different types of people.

It is through her narratives and voices that Plath and her audience still survive. Their keen insistence to tell and retell their traumatic experiences to their readers, who in turn apply the same experience to their own lives, helps greatly in



reconciling with their traumatic experiences. Delving into the narrative perspective and structure of Plath's poems, it is evident that Plath's voice gives a deeper insight into the experiences examined. Since these experiences are traumatic, the poem creates narrative personas, expanding to a universal unknown, unidentified recipient.

Losing her father, at a very young age, Plath expresses her traumatic neurosis of that loss in her poem "The Colossus". The poem presents the relationship of Plath and her dead father. The poem was published in 1960 in the collection "Colossus and Other Poems". The poem is metaphorical as it depicts the Colossus of Rhodes, as a reference to the poet's dead father. The colossus is a statue that existed for forty-four years, but unfortunately collapsed in an earthquake in 224BC. The poem expresses the poet's trauma after her father's loss. Plath employs herself as a caretaker of the statue; symbolizing her father. Reading the poem, it is clear that the poet refers to this relationship with herself and the statue to express her own relationship with her lost father. Here Plath applies the theory of Bishop. In other words, Plath accommodates herself with the idea of loss and recurrent losses of tactile things, represented in the statue, so as to be ready and accept the loss of greater things; represented in her father. The poem contains six stanzas which start with claiming that she can never put the listener back together:

I shall never get you put together entirely,
 Pieced, glued, and properly jointed.
 Mule-bray, pig-grunt and bawdy cackles
 Proceed from your great lips.
 It's worse than a barnyard.



A variety of coarse noises come from his "great lips". In her book *Never Asking Why Build-Only Asking Which Tools: Confessional Poetry and the Construction of the Self*, Rita Horvas comments on Plath's *Colossus* saying: "In such major poems as *Daddy... The Colossus*, Plath attempted to identify one calamity, her father's untimely death, as the original traumatic loss that included, epitomized, and caused all the other traumatic losses of her life (55)". Horvas thinks that the father might be dead, but the poet is the one who suffers; she tries to "identify one calamity"; her father's death as the reason of "all other traumatic losses" of her life. She is unfortunately, stuck in a pattern where she fails to escape her father's loss. While she realizes her failure to escape her father's loss, she can't stop trying to invoke his presence, bringing him back to her life, accepting his loss.

Counting the red stars and those of plum-color.

The sun rises under the pillar of your tongue.

My hours are married to shadow.

No longer do I listen for the scrape of a keel

On the blank stones of the landing.

In the last stanza of the poem, the tone of the poet starts to change somehow, since some slight hope is inserted indirectly, "the red stars" and "plum-color" are lovely optimistic imageries that illuminate the dark atmosphere of the previous stanzas of the poem. To clarify, Plath gradually reaches a solution for her problem. She can now accept the death of her father, represented in the silent motionless statue. According to Gosmann, Plath practices the process of dealing with or working through "a Freudian concept of psychological healing that Plath perhaps alludes to" (53).



Gosmann proceeds saying that "in psychoanalysis theory, trauma can only be overcome if, through narration, the victim exposes herself once again to the events that caused the trauma" (53). This exactly what happens with Plath at the end of the poem. She starts to see some slight light and warm colors. She describes these colors as "married to shadow", so as to remind her readers that she is not totally recovered from her trauma.

She is still trapped by her father's death in a timeless unstoppable manner. Linda Wagner-Martin suggests that "The Colossus, is a confessional poem... Perhaps only in her wry 1959 poem *The Colossus*, does Plath catch this sense of the father as an unattainable Sphinx-like statue an entity more foreboding than real... Plath's writing often focuses on the guilt the daughter feels for her bereavement—she has somehow been responsible for his death, if not the direct agent of it" (12). According to Wagner's view, Plath is a confessional poet as she expresses not only her trauma for the loss of her father, but also her suffering to accommodate with this fact since she feels guilty for not caring enough for her ceased father.

Experiencing trauma since her childhood, Plath's used her poetry to transform trauma into art. Plath's poem "Getting There", is a poem of a different nature. As for the form of the poem, it is composed of three stanzas; the first two stanzas are of thirty-three lines each. Actually, the long stanzas symbolize the long journey of suffering, the poet and all readers, experience in their lives. The poem shows the speaker's experience of getting there, getting to a final destination; may be death. The poem has a dream-like setting where everything is vague. Trauma and the sense of loss are

expressed differently in this poem, as the speaker seems to have been on this journey for a lifetime.

How far is it?
How far is it now?
The gigantic gorilla interior
Of the wheels move, they appall me ——
The terrible brains
Of Krupp, black muzzles
Revolving, the sound
Punching out Absence! Like cannon.

The question "how far is it? How far is it now?" is an indication of the endless pain, trauma and sense of loss the poet feels. It is a psychological journey that the poet rejects since she hates the mechanical movement of "the gigantic gorilla interior/ Of the wheels move" (3-4). Plath generalizes her experience of trauma and loss, applying it to all people in the universe. In

The tent of unending cries ——
A hospital of dolls.
And the men, what is left of the men
Pumped ahead by these pistons, this blood
Into the next mile,
The next hour ——
Dynasty of broken arrows! (27-33)

the poet describes the wounded men in the Russian war, as dolls. They lost their lives. Ikram Hili comments on Plath's



journey saying that the title of the poem "encapsulates Plath's artistic journey, which is often not about a destination but about "Getting There"... The journey is still ongoing, not only for the poet's words, but for the reader's encounters with them" (129). Hili suggests that the unknown narrator seems to take the unknown reader with him on such an inevitable journey in a quest to gain a spiritual psychological relief.

The second stanza repeats the same question of how far is it?

How far is it?

There is mud on my feet,

Thick, red and slipping. It is Adam's
side,

This earth I rise from, and I in agony.

I cannot undo myself, and the train is
steaming.

Steaming and breathing, its teeth

Ready to roll, like a devil's. (34-40)

However, this time the narrator surrenders to death. She seeks a new life in death; "this earth I rise from, and I in agony". Here the traumatic voice of the poet uses the metaphor of the train to indicate the unstoppable nature of human life. In other words, the destructive experience of loss does not stop life. People should accept the pain of loss and turn it to a renewal. Here the renewal is possible since the experience of loss and pain or trauma is possible to be re-narrated over and over again. The poem ends with a two lines-stanza where the poet reaches the resolution of the climax. The concluding couplet shows the peacefulness felt at the end of the journey as the

poet says "Step up to you from the black car of Lethe/ Pure as a baby (67-68)

The dead soul of all the living people who have once experienced trauma is now "pure as a baby", a direct reference to rebirth and renewal of not only the physical pain, but also the psychological one. David Holbroo comments on Plath's *Getting There*:

In a poem like *Getting There*, it seems that she felt her whole working life was, or should be, a spiritual journey, like that of the literal, the "objective", the material dominance of "matter in motion", and in dismay, like the heroine of the *Wishing Box*, she seeks renewal in death (19).

As the early death and loss of her father left her unsecured, Plath tries to reconcile with death and find her resolution in accepting death, not as the end of life, but as a rebirth or a renewal.

In *Lost Loss in American Elegiac Poetry*, Toshiaki Komura describes the "unresolved grief" as

difficult to problem-solve because one would not yet know whether the loss is final or temporary; one is detained in an indefinite period of indeterminacy, which jeopardizes the possibility of closure...if we are to define traumas triggered by a breach of trust, ambiguous loss can be regarded as a source of traumatization (73-74)

Here, Komura defines ambiguous loss as a vague feeling of grief of final or temporary loss; "ambiguous loss is



particularly pernicious because its lack of clarity complicates the possibility of resolution (73). Komura believes that "it would certainly be tempting to examine Sylvia Plath's poetry through the lens of ambiguous loss...A number of poems mourning for the dead father—paints a portrait of a lyric-speaker spellbound to the shadow of the physically dead but psychologically present father" (74). By ambiguous loss, Komura means the loss of un-identified entity. There is something lost, but it is unspecific.

Like most of Plath's poems, "Daddy" (1962), as Komura describes it, is a "cycle of death poem" (75). Plath's father left her alone facing the world, unsafe without any protection. She suffers trauma as she was surrounded by his shadow, while he is physically absent. The poem actually mourns the loss of Otto Plath who died when Sylvia was just nine.

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
 (Daddy, stanza one).

The sixteen-stanza poem starts with a surprising introductory stanza where the poet describes her relationship with her father, comparing him to a "black shoe", and herself to a "foot". This foot is "poor and white" because it is deprived of its protecting shoes at a very young age. The image is extremely moving and pathetic. In the second stanza, Plath shocks her readers saying that "I have had to kill you". However, she didn't have the chance to kill her father, as he

died before she could do so. This traumatic and shocking confession is significant as it reflects what Komura and Boss refer to as ambiguous loss. The loss of Plath in Daddy is ambiguous due to the fact that she lost her father physically, while she was always afraid of him, psychologically in his lifetime. She was always afraid of his "neat mustache", and "Aryan eye, bright blue", as she states in the ninth stanza of the poem.

In stanza twelve the poet says,

Bit my pretty red heart in two.
I was ten when they buried you.
At twenty I tried to die
And get back, back, back to you.
I thought even the bones would do.

The poet now confesses her trauma after her father's loss. He has broken her heart. She loved him dearly despite his seriousness. She reveals her extreme sadness for his loss as she wants to have her bones buried by his, so as to compensate his actual absence from her life. The poem ends with:

There's a stake in your fat black heart
And the villagers never liked you.
They are dancing and stamping on you.
They always knew it was you.
Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

With the concluding stanza, the bereaved daughter tells her dead father that she is through with him. Although he has been dead for years, he is psychologically alive in her



memory and life. She struggles to accept his death. According to Lain Twiddy,

the work of mourning can then involve bringing to the surface all that the mourner has previously repressed in order to function in society, then repressing it again, once reconciliation with the dead—if possible—has been achieved. However, it might be in this case that painful memories were better left buried: although mourning offers a chance for reworking of unequal relations, the new sense of self or agency possible must be weighed against the exposure intrinsic to this new psychological territory. This is the feeling encapsulated at the end of Sylvia Plath's feral elegy "Daddy", where having stabbed her vampire father through the heart with a stake, the woman-child declares, triumphantly or hopelessly, Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through (55).

Lain Twiddy believes that Plath struggles to reconcile with her father's death through admitting and confessing her traumatic neurosis. There are mixed emotions in her poem Daddy, as she portrays her unreconciled grief over a father she fears and loves at the same time. This exactly explains the meaning of trauma, and its relation to reconciliation. The poet lets her unconscious flow in order to turn her father's death into the conscious zone, and finally reconcile with his death.



Out of the foundations of Sigmund Freud's *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1933), Erin McGlothlin's *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature Legacies of Survival and Perpetration* (2006), and Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narratives and History* (1996), manifest their analysis of the human reaction to trauma. Freud's theories form the understructure for Caruth's and Mc Glothlin's interpretation of traumatic experiences and their impact on human development. Since best literature comes out of psychological troubles, hard experiences, and trauma, it was, hopefully, significant to analyze the poetry of Plath and Bishop in relation to traumatic experiences, showing how trauma contributes to psychological development, reconciliation and acceptance. Analyzing the poems of Bishop and Plath, it is, hopefully, evident that the relationship between trauma and literature is intimate. The poetry of both poets, as exemplified in this paper, is a pathetic panorama of pain, trauma, suffering and loss. Both are confessional poets who uncover their deep inner hidden feelings, to their readers in an attempt to normalize and neutralize these dark emotions. They start by accepting losses, and end by reconciling with these losses. Since death is the absolute end of everything in human life, Bishop and Plath choose, through their art, to reconcile with death. They start by the acceptance of the loss of minute useless things, as in Bishop's "One Art", ending with singing a new contract with death, considering it the inevitable passage for renewal and rebirth, as in Plath's "Getting There".



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