



Exhuming Trauma, Fear and Hatred beyond Borders: A Freudian Psychoanalysis of Sylvia Plath and Parveen Shakir's Poetry

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ABSTRACT

Background: This article dives into the raw, often painful worlds of Sylvia Plath and Parveen Shakir, exploring how trauma, fear, and hatred grew in their hauntingly stunning poetry. By using the lens of Freudian psychology, this research digs up ghosts in both poetesses' writings which are hidden forces like the death force and repressed recollections. On one hand, Plath wrestled with self-destruction and own family struggle using a sharp language that cuts like a knife. On the other hand, Shakir navigated the sensitive stability of choice and heartbreak in the strict social obstacles of South Asian context.

Objective: To examine manifestations of repression, ambivalence, melancholia, and the death drive in selected texts of both authors.

Methodology: Methodology under the lens of psychoanalytical theory is adopted to demystify trauma, melancholia fear and hatred in the poetry of selected poetesses.

Results: The findings of this study indicate that trauma does not care about obstacles of languages and borders rather it is transcendental. Whether it ends in the annihilation we see in Plath's work or the unending longing located in Shakir's, the archetype is the same: a haunted human soul seeking to make sense of an apocalyptic world. It is vivid through their work at the same time thoughts may be in a conflict or repetition compulsion, it is art that plays the role of a bridge to cross over from apocalyptic world to a balanced life. Their poetry is not an ordinary bunch of words; it is proof of a series of human existence through which they provide a meaningful language to reflect and understand us.

Conclusion: This article concludes that both Sylvia Plath and Parveen Shakir have been navigating the equally deep and frequently wild forces of human heart. By applying Freudian psychoanalytic lens, this paper explored how the subconscious techniques, old wounds, invisible fears and demise pressure build and shape rhythm and imagery in their poetry.

INTRODUCTION

Sylvia Plath (1932–1963) and Parveen Shakir (1952–1994) both belong to different spheres of the world however there is a clear resemblance in the language they use, the language of the soul. Plath is considered a minaret of Western confessional poetry acknowledged for her sharp, regularly violent explorations of fragmented thoughts. In comparison, Shakir presented a challenging female angle that always fight for a legitimate space. On one angle, they might look opposite however, if we dig out deeper, we observe that Plath's poetry is a semi violent storm of alienation and

anger. On the other hand, Shakir celebrates her desirous dance of sensitivity and aesthetics. But, if we look closer, there is a deep pain of emotions, abandonment and the inner fight that we all are part of in a parallel world. In Western context, Plath's poem *Ariel* redefines unpleasant topics of trauma, suicide and an experience of existential wrath.

However, in Pakistan, Shakir's debut collection entitled *Khushbu* (fragrance) proved an emotional revolution among oriental female Anglophone writers. She, regardless of the part of a colonial-society that enforces to be silent, gave a chance to womanish aspects of longing, jealousy and betrayal. While analyzing their work, critics

often look at them differently, but I argue that there is a deeper connection of human psyche. Both the poets spent their lives exhuming very own ache. With the help of a systematic and beautiful obsession, they showcased their dark recollections, the sting of betrayal, worry of loss and even self-hatred into a large canvas. Irrespective of their geographical and lingual differences, they have been each trying to escape and survive the same shadow of past.

Objectives

- To examine manifestations of repression, ambivalence, melancholia, and the death drive
- To analyze selected poems through Freudian psychoanalytic theory
- To compare Western confessional poetry with South Asian lyrical tradition

Significance of the Research

This research is significant in connection with Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis and literary artwork of Sylvia Plath and Parveen Shakir who masterly dealt with their inner demons. Consequently, I am exploring the subconscious drives and the emotive disruptions in their writing to see how they turned their darkest fears into art, proving that poetry is often a survival approach for the soul.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Participants

Exhuming literature under the lens of psychoanalysis is different from ordinary reading because while doing so, we are observing the work of a subconscious mind. Sigmund Freud's foundational ideas suggest that a poem can feature just like a dream (Freud 1915; 1920). A deeper space in which our hidden conflicts, needs and drives no matter sooner or later discovered a manner to talk (Jones 1953). Thinkers like Eagleton (1996) and Tyson (2006) have long advocated this approach, arguing that the symbolic language poet use is mostly a clever set of linguistic patterns that do not come up at surface immediately. When we speak about trauma, it only turns into a vivid picture. As Caruth (1996) and other theorists have referred to, it is hard to evaluate the exact moment it occurs. However, it returns later showing up in a poet's stanza or in a person's life through repetitive pictures and fragmented rhythms. In poetry, the pain and sufferings are so sharp which breaks the narrative aside "leaving in the back of a trail of metaphors that struggles to make feel of the past" (Van der Kolk and Van der Hart 1995). Sylvia Plath is indeed the most well-known example of representation of this inner disaster. For many years, critics like Bassnett (1987) and Wagner-Martin (2004) have explored how her violent imagery and self-adverse subject

matters were not simply "art," however an intuitive reflected image of her mental conflicts (Bassnett 1987; Gill 2007). Whether her images are regarded as a feminist riot in opposition to a suffocating society or a literal manifestation of Freud's "dying force", it is vivid that her series *Ariel* represents a raw but cathartic breaking factor (Showalter 1977; Wagner-Martin 2004).

On the other side, Parveen Shakir proved equally revolutionary in Urdu poetry. She modernizes the Urdu ghazal and gave it a striving new feminist voice that ultimately provides equally deep mental scrutiny of inner character. Shakir's poetry is full of lyrical beauty that hides inner warfare of betrayal, jealousy, and social constraints. There is an overlooked possibility right here to see how her "feminine subjectivity" as described by Freud is truly a complex negotiation of the same everyday psychic conflicts (Rahman 1997; Ali 2009).

By bringing Plath and Shakir on a surface collectively, we are able to see how Freud's principles majorly from *The Unconscious* (1915) and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) just like the "repetition compulsion" are vivid wherein we unconsciously reenact our ache, or the "melancholia" where we overthrow our anger inward and practice to the human heart regardless of language. Similarly, in *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), Freud distinguishes between healthy mourning and compulsive melancholia—where the lost object is internalized and the ego turns aggressive toward itself. This is also clear and comparable in the work of both poets which approximately coming across how the mind, while confronted with loss and trauma, makes use of the beauty of a poem to keep from falling apart.

Research gap

In this critique, I used Freudian psychoanalysis as a flashlight to see into the "unconscious" (Freud 1915) angles of these poems. I am searching for the ones repressed reminiscences and hidden emotions that Freud first recognized in 1915, the ones quiet whispers under the surface of the text. This includes exploring the "dying drive" (Thanatos), wherein we see the poets wrestling with self-destructive impulses, and identifying the various "protection Mechanisms" (Freud 1926)—like repression or projection—that a mind uses to protect itself from ache. Through treating their dream-like imagery and symbolic language as signifiers of a deeper mental truth, I will begin to see the poems as maps of the human soul in misery. For Sylvia Plath, I notice on her maximum raw and unfiltered works, specifically from the collection *Ariel*. In poems like *Daddy* and *Lady Lazarus*, I see her confronting paternal trauma and the cyclical nature of her personal struggle. For Parveen Shakir, we look to the evocative verses in "*Khushbu*" (fragrance) and the haunting traces of "*Tanha Tanha*" (Lonely Lonely), which capture the profound pain of

abandonment and longing. Those particular works were selected due to the fact they do not simply point out emotion; they stay in it, imparting a deep engagement with the form of relational ruptures and psychological extremes that shape human experience.

Limitations

While there is a list of psychoanalysts working on the same field including Lacan who presented his complex theory of “object-relations” however, this study focused only on the core ideas of Freud. By further narrowing the focus, I explored the classic Freudian concepts i.e., trauma, fear, hatred and inner conflict that connect these two writers. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that Parveen Shakir wrote her heart out in Urdu. While translating her work into English allows me to share it with a wider audience, some of the delicate layers and “hidden” meanings of her original language might naturally lose a bit of their luster in translation. I have done my best to honor her original intent while recognizing that every language has its own unique soul.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In *Lady Lazarus*, Sylvia Plath presents daily life into a poignant cycle of death and rebirth notably writing that she has “done it once more” (Plath 1965) once each decade. This continuous rhythm shows like a vivid instance of Freud’s “repetition compulsion,” where thoughts remain connected with old wounds in a firm effort to hold them in the end (Freud 1920). Her voice travels among dark, biting humor and cold sense of fear which indicates an invited traumatic visitor in her subconscious who is unwilling to leave. Furthermore, in “*Daddy*”, Plath’s aggressive attitude towards her father serves as a classical example of “psychic displacement” she carries an inner suffocating anger and shifts it into an external image. When she ends with the famous line, “Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I’m through, (Plath 1965)” we observe a person struggling to get rid of twisted psychic web. Plath’s use of terms death and its remains is not just a poetic fondness however, it clearly indicates towards Freud’s concept of Thanatos, the “dying drive” (Freud 1926). As Showalter (1977) argues, her fascination of being wiped away reflects an appeal toward seldom destruction. Even if we examine these poems under a political lens, a Freudian opinion guides us to observe the internal war she turned into fighting. In comparison, Parveen Shakir’s work explores a pain that is simply deep, however subtle to some extent. Her use of metaphors i.e., “fragrance” and “shadows” talks about longing and absence which may indicates a “displacement” of her own fears of being alienated or worse, abandoned to life. In most of her Urdu ghazals, her beloved turns into a “partial item” and in Freudian terms; it is a source of both extreme desire and painful denial that ultimately leaves the poet stuck into a situation of keep protecting or move on.

Shakir’s use of anger in poetry is often silent and oblique, tucked away in hints like “Your silence weighs heavier than your phrases (Shakir 1977)”. Here, we see the practical shape of the “projection” _when a mind feels an internal anger and can’t openly express, it places it onto the silent loved one. At one side, Plath’s hatred is a two way storm that runs both inward and outward however, Shakir’s is subjected to return by cultural expectancies for a female in a patriarchal society of South Asia. Moreover, Plath thinks suicide is a charming compulsion and faces loss of life however, Shakir on the other hand, circumnavigates trauma through the pain of unsatisfied preference. Plath’s pain works around in a modest way, however Shakir’s is a long awaited and has unresolved desire. Additionally, their truth is also shaped differently as per their field of living. For example, being the habitant of a Western “confessional” style of society, Plath has a privilege to speak out both psychologically and physically. On the other hand, Shakir, being the part of Urdu subculture, is bound to divert her anger into a hostile and rhythmic unhappiness. Nevertheless, both used their artwork for “sublimation,” rotating their raw, subconscious pain into something lasting. In *Daddy*, Plath addresses her dominant father figure with a symbolic “killing” that openly reflects oedipal complex—a mix of love and hatred that Freud referred to as ambivalence. With the help of Nazi imagery i.e., “Panzer-man”, she further turns her father into a tyrant while connecting her private trauma to a larger ancient canvas. Here Freud’s theories on “melancholia” help give justification to why she turns her aggression again towards herself while keeping the figure she fights to break out.

In *Lady Lazarus*, Plath shapes the act of death into “artwork” which flawlessly showcased the Thanatos drive _an immediate desire to cease the pain and conquer it. Even in *Tulips*, she is so alienated and in search of “regression,” as a defensive tool and wants to be “no one”. Regardless of red plants which are pulling her back as intrusive nostalgia, she further wants to be an empty quite nation. Meanwhile Shakir remains extra limited towards her feelings. In her collection *Khushbu* (fragrance), she is of the view that love is as sailing as a fragrance and the absence of her beloved causes deep Freudian melancholia in which the ego suffers in silence. Her anxiety is interpersonal _she is not as bold as Plath to die however; she is worried of facing emotional eraser. Ultimately, unlike Plath’s trauma which leads closer to a final extinction, Shakir’s leads towards a lifetime desire. Plath externalizes her anger with a loud voice, whilst Shakir respires it into an allegory. However, each emphasizes the importance of how mind uses poetry to live on its personal shadows. Consequently, the story of human resilience is everlasting even before the Freudian aspects and technical structure of a poem/ghazal. Sylvia Plath and Parveen Shakir were part of extraordinary cultures and their fight for social justice was also same. They raised voice for the shadow of the heart. Their fight is not ordinary because it highlights the worry of being removed and betrayed from their beloved. It

further unveils the heavy weight of trauma that is vivid in their writing. They both fought unconsciously and made it visible among the social fabric.

Plath considers poetry a high-stakes area where she fought for a loud and violent battle with the help of her own psyche. According to her to manage with inner fury, a timeless loud and shout talk is the only survival tool. No matter if it looks aggressive or “un-ladylike” it is still mandatory. But for Shakir, the struggle is severe but quitter. However, she also justifies that being quieter is not “silence” rather it is a giant energy of longing and restraint. She personifies her pain as a perfume which aroma stays and haunts the room long after the departure of her beloved. Consequently, this analysis indicates that trauma does not bother about borders or languages. No matter it ends in the “annihilation” we see in Plath’s work or the “endless longing” traced in Shakir’s, it has same basis: a schizophrenic human soul seeking to make sense of an apocalyptic world. Their work, as an asset, prove that at the same time as the thoughts may be a place of combat and “repetition compulsion” art plays its role as a bridge and humans may cross over from suffering into understanding. They did not write just poems but built existence rafts out of the words that ultimately provide us with a meaningful language to understand our own shadows.

CONCLUSION

Both Sylvia Plath and Parveen Shakir through their poems have been navigating the equally deep and frequently stormy waters of human heart. With the help of Freudian concepts, I explored how the hidden truths of unconscious desires, fears, old wounds and demise pressure create rhythm and imagery in the poetry. I auxiliary explored that Plath’s work is a war of the words, words that damages herself inertly. Also, her father’s control on her that she could not get rid of. Advocating Freud’s ideas of “repetition compulsion” and “Thanatos”. Comparatively, Shakir’s world is a heartbreak but sensitive where she fights for “longing” and “projection” to justify her voice in a frequently quitter subculture. Like every woman, she transformed her internal chaos and apocalypse into a lovely scenery and canvas of the words which leads to a beautiful pathway. A pathway that according to Shakir, is her justified way to the logical world. If Plath’s journey is aggressive and full of explosions, pushing her towards the edges of life Shakir’s however is, to still connect with the lyrical disappointed and hurting road of life. This study further conclude that “repetition compulsion” in the way Plath revisits her pain, “melancholia” Shakir assumes her losses, and “sublimation” in the way each poet grew to become their suffering into ageless art. Plath might also have been more self-adverse whilst Shakir remained existence-putting forward in spite of her wounds, however each have been “exhuming” their trauma from the shadows of the thoughts. Eventually, through these two voices, while our cultures

might also different but the way we reveal our trauma and fear is deeply connected. With the help of Freudian Psychoanalysis, I have only unveiled one aspect of theoretic work however, there are still other psychological perspectives i.e., Lacanian speech and desire, feminism, queer theory and Marxism, through which some future researchers can circumnavigate these pieces of literature in a more specific way. Doing so would not just assist us apprehend literature; it allows us to understand the shared language of human ache and the exquisite ways we use art to live on it.

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DATA AVAILABILITY

The data will be made available on a fair request to the corresponding author.

ETHICS APPROVAL

Not applicable to this study.

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