Advance Journal of Management and Social Sciences
Adv. J. Man. Soc. Sci
Volume: 9; Issue: 04,
July-August, 2025
ISSN: 2383 – 6355
Impact Factor: 6.76
Advance Scholars Publication
Published by International Institute of Advance Scholars Development
https://aspjournals.org/Journals/index.php/ajmss/index

REBELLION AND RECLAMATION: A RADICAL FEMINIST COMPARISON OF SYLVIA PLATH'S DADDY AND ASHLEY SINCLAIR'S ODE TO THE PATRIARCHY

Dr. Reuben Onyishi and Vitalis Chinemerem Iloanwusi
Department of English and Literary Studies, Faculty of Arts, Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu State.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16947808

Keywords: *radical feminism, patriarchal resistance, Sylvia Plath, Ashley Sinclair, feminist poetic insurgency*

Abstract: *This paper presents a radical feminist comparison of Sylvia Plath's Daddy and Ashley Sinclair's Ode to the Patriarchy, focusing on how both poets dismantle patriarchal authority through violent imagery and unapologetic female voice. Drawing on radical feminist theory as developed by Kate Millett, Catharine MacKinnon, and Shulamith Firestone, the study explores how each poem transforms personal trauma into collective rebellion, exposing the mechanisms through which patriarchy silences, disciplines, and controls women. Through a close textual analysis, the research identifies patterns of symbolic patricide, linguistic violence, and the rejection of apology and silence as strategies of resistance. Empirical reviews of feminist criticism and contemporary poetic expressions provide further insight into how both works reflect and contribute to feminist literary insurgency. The findings reveal that both Plath and Sinclair reject conciliatory aesthetics in favor of poetic aggression, reframing poetry as an act of political warfare and self-liberation. Ultimately, the paper argues that their poems are not merely artistic expressions but radical declarations that challenge the linguistic, emotional, and structural foundations of patriarchal culture.*

Introduction

Radical feminism is a literary and ideological weapon that tears through the fabric of patriarchal authority, making space for new female subjectivities. It is not reformist but revolutionary, not conciliatory but confrontational. In poetry, radical feminism finds a home in the voices of women who refuse to write prettily or politely. Sylvia Plath and Ashley Sinclair are two such women, separated by decades but united in resistance. Their

Advance Journal of Management and Social Sciences
Adv. J. Man. Soc. Sci
Volume: 9; Issue: 04,
July-August, 2025
ISSN: 2383 – 6355
Impact Factor: 6.76
Advance Scholars Publication
Published by International Institute of Advance Scholars Development
https://aspjournals.org/Journals/index.php/ajmss/index

poems, Daddy and Ode to the Patriarchy, burn with the heat of feminist rage.

Sylvia Plath's Daddy has long been regarded as one of the most controversial poems in modern confessional poetry. Written just before her suicide in 1963, it articulates a terrifyingly intimate rebellion against a patriarchal father figure, using Nazi imagery, vampiric metaphors, and emotional extremism. Plath's speaker is not a victim but an executioner, pronouncing a final, ritualistic break with her father and, by extension, with male power. In Daddy, resistance takes the form of violent language—poetry as both weapon and wound. This is not catharsis but confrontation.

Ashley Sinclair's Ode to the Patriarchy is a modern poetic indictment of societal misogyny. Her lines are rooted in feminist solidarity, trauma, and self-awareness, spoken in the voice of a woman suffocated by systemic oppression. Sinclair's poem resists traditional poetic structure, instead erupting in free verse and anaphoric rhythms that mimic the spiral of female rage. Her speaker rises again and again, only to be mocked and silenced by a patriarchal voice that "spills a little" of its prejudice while receiving applause. It is a poem about inherited submission—and its rejection.

Though written in different historical contexts—mid-century America and contemporary Britain—Daddy and Ode to the Patriarchy share a deep-rooted radical feminist core. They use violent metaphors, subversive diction, and unapologetic emotionality to reject patriarchal norms. Each poet dismantles male authority: Plath by metaphorically killing the father and the lover; Sinclair by unveiling the invisible social codes that suffocate the feminine. Both poets scream in a world that prefers them quiet. And in screaming, they reclaim power.

The motivation for this paper stems from the urgency to re-engage with radical feminist texts in the face of contemporary cultural backlash against feminism. As reactionary politics surge globally, there is a need to revisit voices that refused compromise. Plath and Sinclair give us such voices—unapologetic, raw, and anti-patriarchal. Their poems are not only about protest; they are protests. They challenge both literature and society to listen to women without silencing or sanitizing them.

This study is interested in how poetry becomes a stage for dismantling patriarchal myths and reclaiming female identity through violence—not physical, but poetic and symbolic. Plath and Sinclair do not simply express dissatisfaction; they attack systems of power. Their metaphors—"a stake in your fat black heart," "his words are a bible we don't recall reading"—are not decorative but destructive. This is feminism at its most radical: iconoclastic, emotional, and disruptive. The poem becomes a tomb for patriarchy.

The objective of this paper is threefold. First, it examines how Daddy and Ode to the

Advance Journal of Management and Social Sciences
Adv. J. Man. Soc. Sci
Volume: 9; Issue: 04,
July-August, 2025
ISSN: 2383 – 6355
Impact Factor: 6.76
Advance Scholars Publication
Published by International Institute of Advance Scholars Development
https://aspjournals.org/Journals/index.php/ajmss/index

Patriarchy perform radical feminist resistance through the use of violent language. Second, it interrogates the role of metaphor and tone in dismantling patriarchal authority across personal, political, and cultural registers. Third, it positions these texts within a global radical feminist tradition that includes both Western and contemporary female writers engaged in literary activism. Ultimately, this comparison offers insight into the evolution and continuity of feminist dissent.

It is also important to note the ways in which the body, both linguistic and literal, appears in these poems. Plath's speaker says she has "had to kill" the father; Sinclair's voice is "gasping," "suffocating," "spiralling." These bodily metaphors suggest that patriarchy is not merely institutional but visceral—etched into women's physical and psychic being. Radical feminist writing, then, becomes a form of exorcism. The poet writes the pain and the purge. The poem is the site of that violent rebirth.

Another aspect worthy of investigation is the poetic structure and how it reflects feminist politics. Plath's use of tightly structured stanzas with chant-like repetition evokes both control and hysteria, creating a dissonance that mirrors the internalized oppression of the speaker. Sinclair, in contrast, uses erratic enjambments and visual fragmentation to suggest rupture, disorder, and rejection of patriarchal poetics. Both are stylistic decisions rooted in radical feminist aesthetics—destroying old forms to create space for new ones.

These poets also engage in cultural reclamation. Plath reclaims trauma by naming it; Sinclair reclaims voice by refusing apology. In Sinclair's poem, the word "sorry" becomes an emblem of internalized oppression, repeated until it turns bitter. Plath's "I do, I do" mimics the wedding vow but drips with sarcasm and finality. These poets rewire cultural rituals—marriage, mourning, obedience—into rituals of rebellion. They do not seek validation; they seek rupture.

Furthermore, this paper interrogates the idea of intergenerational and intertextual feminist discourse. Sinclair's poem can be read as a literary descendant of Plath's. Both speak to the shared female condition across time and geography: the experience of being seen as "just a girl" in a man's world. Through this comparison, we trace how feminist resistance evolves stylistically but remains thematically rooted in the pursuit of liberation. Plath's metaphorical death becomes Sinclair's metaphorical rising—both are acts of defiance.

The final paragraph of this introduction acknowledges the controversial nature of these poems and embraces it as a necessity. Feminist rage is often policed or dismissed as irrational, but in Daddy and Ode to the Patriarchy, rage is transformative. These poets teach us that to reclaim one's self, one must first reject the lie of patriarchal benevolence. This paper situates

Advance Journal of Management and Social Sciences
Adv. J. Man. Soc. Sci
Volume: 9; Issue: 04,
July-August, 2025
ISSN: 2383 – 6355
Impact Factor: 6.76
Advance Scholars Publication
Published by International Institute of Advance Scholars Development
https://aspjournals.org/Journals/index.php/ajmss/index

their work within radical feminist theory, not only to celebrate their literary contributions but to assert their enduring relevance. Poetry, here, is resistance, revolution, and reclamation.

Conceptual Review

Symbolic Patricide and Literary Iconoclasm

Symbolic patricide refers to the rejection, deconstruction, and metaphorical "killing" of the patriarchal father figure in literature and culture. In radical feminist writing, this act becomes a necessary strategy for liberating the female self from inherited oppression. Sylvia Plath's Daddy is perhaps the most cited example of this gesture, in which the speaker declares, "Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through" (Plath). It is a poetic execution, drenched in emotional violence, in which the father is no longer mourned but erased. In Ashley Sinclair's Ode to the Patriarchy, the father figure becomes diffuse and systemic—the "he" who mocks, snarls, and silences—but the impulse is the same: to disrupt patriarchal continuity by refusing reverence. Both poems participate in what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar call a "rebellion against literary paternity" (Gilbert and Gubar 49).

Sylvia Plath's metaphorical killing of her father in Daddy is framed within a deeply personal yet culturally explosive narrative. The use of Holocaust imagery ("A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen") positions the father not just as a personal oppressor but as an emblem of institutional cruelty. Critics like Jacqueline Rose have argued that Plath's excessive metaphor is deliberate: "the outrage is meant to offend, to disturb the reader's complicity in systems of control" (Rose 165). Plath's patricide is therefore more than psychological—it is political. The father is symbolic of patriarchal law, and his elimination is a radical rewriting of authority.

Ashley Sinclair's approach is more diffuse but no less radical. In Ode to the Patriarchy, the father figure is the patriarchal society itself—a system embedded in "pigtails," "cherry lips," and the reflexive "sorry" that haunts the speaker. She is not merely rejecting a single man, but the entire apparatus that polices femininity. Sinclair's "He mocks, he snarls, he stares" becomes a refrain for the ubiquitous male gaze. Like Plath, Sinclair ends with resistance: "We rise again." The act of standing, of refusing silence, becomes its own symbolic patricide. As bell hooks reminds us, "to be truly feminist is to love oneself enough to kill off the parts of us colonized by male supremacy" (Feminism is for Everybody 56).

These poems also serve as literary iconoclasm—rituals of desecration aimed at sacred patriarchal texts and traditions. Plath mocks the icon of the father-priest, casting him as a "ghastly statue," "a bag full of God," only to drive a "stake" through his heart. The religious overtones are not accidental. The poem is a blasphemy against father-worship, echoing feminist theorist Mary

Advance Journal of Management and Social Sciences
Adv. J. Man. Soc. Sci
Volume: 9; Issue: 04,
July-August, 2025
ISSN: 2383 – 6355
Impact Factor: 6.76
Advance Scholars Publication
Published by International Institute of Advance Scholars Development
https://aspjournals.org/Journals/index.php/ajmss/index

Daly's assertion that "if God is male, then the male is God" (Daly 19). Plath's rejection is therefore spiritual as well as poetic—it is a renunciation of inherited faith in male divinity. Sinclair, too, unravels male-centered mythologies. "His words are a bible we don't recall reading," she writes, calling into question not only speech but sacred knowledge systems. In her world, the male voice is undeservedly canonical.

The poets do not merely name the father—they unname him. Plath reduces her father to parts: a "toe," a "black shoe," a "Panzer-man." He is dismembered by metaphor, no longer coherent, no longer whole. Sinclair similarly fragments patriarchy into rituals of daily life—jokes, apologies, dinner, and coffee—all of which seem benign until she strips them of their disguise. Her feminist lens turns domesticity into a battlefield, where every word and gesture becomes a weapon of control or a cry for help. As Julia Kristeva writes, "to speak is to expel the father" (Revolution in Poetic Language 92). Both poets embrace this expulsion fully.

In sum, Daddy and Ode to the Patriarchy enact symbolic patricide not to celebrate destruction, but to clear the ground for rebirth. The daughter must kill the father, not out of hate, but because his image blocks her vision of herself. This feminist iconoclasm is not nihilistic—it is generative. By tearing down patriarchal idols, these poets carve out a space where women's voices, bodies, and truths can emerge without shame or subservience. The poem, in their hands, becomes a tomb and a womb—a site of burial and beginning.

Language of Violence and the Poetics of Rage

Radical feminist poetry often utilizes violent language not as an aesthetic shock, but as a linguistic form of rebellion. Both Daddy by Sylvia Plath and Ode to the Patriarchy by Ashley Sinclair are examples of how women poets convert suppressed trauma into charged expressions of rage. This rage is not random or melodramatic—it is methodical, metaphorical, and political. Plath's infamous lines, "I have had to kill you," and Sinclair's call to "Spit it out! Spit it out!" exemplify a poetics that disturbs, disorients, and disrupts. The violence here is metaphorical but carries emotional intensity meant to rupture both personal silence and social complacency.

In Plath's Daddy, violent diction is essential to the poem's architecture. Words like "kill," "vampire," "devil," and "bastard" are laced with aggression, transforming poetry into an act of linguistic revenge. The father becomes a monster, a Nazi, a vampire—each metaphor intensifying the poem's emotional pitch. Critics such as Marsha Bryant contend that Plath's violence is "a feminist strategy that dramatizes the trauma of being silenced by paternal authority" (Bryant 98). The poem's final

Advance Journal of Management and Social Sciences
Adv. J. Man. Soc. Sci
Volume: 9; Issue: 04,
July-August, 2025
ISSN: 2383 – 6355
Impact Factor: 6.76
Advance Scholars Publication
Published by International Institute of Advance Scholars Development
https://aspjournals.org/Journals/index.php/ajmss/index

declaration—"I'm through"—is not resignation but rupture. It marks the speaker's refusal to participate in a language system that venerates patriarchal power.

Ashley Sinclair's Ode to the Patriarchy adopts a different register but accomplishes a similar disruption. Her language is raw, contemporary, and disobedient to traditional poetic form. She writes, "Desperation infused with feminine rage: and yet, her screams are silent," acknowledging both the intensity of female fury and the cultural expectation to mute it. Sinclair's refrain—"She shouts, she cries, she screams!"—echoes with feminist militancy. Unlike Plath's tightly structured stanzas, Sinclair's free verse is fragmentary and breathless, embodying a broken world where patriarchal dominance is omnipresent. Her poetry resists not only content norms but also the formal traditions shaped by male literary standards.

Both poets refuse politeness. They weaponize language to reject inherited femininity characterized by passivity and apology. Sinclair interrogates the word "sorry," calling it a "metallic and bitter" reflex passed down from girlhood. It becomes the very emblem of internalized subjugation. Plath, in contrast, reclaims the power of the curse. "Daddy, daddy, you bastard," she writes—not with shame, but with victorious finality. As feminist theorist Catharine MacKinnon argues, "Rage is the recognition of reality. It is the first step toward changing it" (Toward a Feminist Theory of the State 123). Both poems take that first step—and several more—with fearless clarity.

Violent language in radical feminist poetry also confronts the idea that femininity must be beautiful or lyrical. These poets disrupt the patriarchal demand that women speak gently, if at all. Plath and Sinclair do not care for being liked; they care for being heard. Their metaphors are abrasive, their tone unapologetic. As Adrienne Rich states, "The woman writer who is honest with herself will begin to excavate the substrata of female anger that lies beneath the polite smile" (On Lies, Secrets, and Silence 276). That excavation, in these poems, becomes an explosive rupture of patriarchal expectation.

This violence is also rhythmic and performative. Plath's repetitive "Ich, ich, ich" and Sinclair's echoing "sorry, sorry, sorry" mimic the breakdown of language itself—suggesting that patriarchal language cannot contain feminist truth. The breakdown is not failure but resistance. Judith Butler notes that "language fails women because it was not made for them" (Excitable Speech 8). In response, Plath and Sinclair forge a new grammar of rage, a syntax of resistance. Their violence becomes the form through which their politics breathe.

Ultimately, the poetics of rage in Daddy and Ode to the Patriarchy signify a feminist refusal to beautify oppression. These poems are not confessions; they are confrontations. They are

Advance Journal of Management and Social Sciences
Adv. J. Man. Soc. Sci
Volume: 9; Issue: 04,
July-August, 2025
ISSN: 2383 – 6355
Impact Factor: 6.76
Advance Scholars Publication
Published by International Institute of Advance Scholars Development
https://aspjournals.org/Journals/index.php/ajmss/index

not pleas; they are battle cries. Their violent language shatters silence, exposes pain, and reclaims power. It is this radical honesty that makes their work enduring—not because it is comfortable, but because it is uncompromising.

Apology, Silence, and the Grammar of Feminist Awakening

Feminist awakening often begins with an interrogation of silence: why women are taught not to speak, or to apologize when they do. In both Sylvia Plath's Daddy and Ashley Sinclair's Ode to the Patriarchy, silence is not merely the absence of sound—it is the symptom of cultural subjugation. These poems explore how patriarchal structures condition women into obedience through linguistic habits like deference, politeness, and apology. But in these texts, such learned behavior is not passively accepted; it is shattered. Feminist awakening, here, begins when the speaker realizes that silence is not natural, but imposed—and that speech, particularly angry and unapologetic speech, is a revolutionary act.

Ashley Sinclair's poem vividly captures this realization in her focus on the word "sorry." She writes, "Yet when did I learn to say sorry as the precursor for every sentence? It drips from my mouth, unstoppable." The apology becomes a haunting reflex, one that encodes submission and internalized inferiority. It is no longer a social nicety; it is a wound. Sinclair positions the act of apologizing not as self-awareness, but as self-erasure—a product of patriarchal grooming. Her poem stages a rebellion against this grammar of obedience. The feminist awakening comes in recognizing apology as a cultural performance that must be unlearned.

Similarly, in Daddy, Plath breaks free from the silence imposed by death, grief, and reverence. The poem is not soft mourning—it is a scream. The speaker, once voiceless under the weight of the father's myth, now declares, "I have had to kill you." Her words are not whispered—they are shouted, chanted, spat. Literary scholar Christina Britzolakis argues that "Plath's refusal to be silent about the father, to violate the sacredness of his memory, is a feminist gesture that defies cultural taboos" (Britzolakis 73). The poem is not about finding closure; it's about rupturing inherited codes of silence.

Both poets dramatize the transition from muteness to voice as central to feminist awakening. The repetition of "she shouts, she cries, she screams" in Sinclair's poem marks a crescendo of defiance. Each verb is an escalation, a refusal to be quiet. But Sinclair also reminds us that this voice often goes unheard: "her screams are silent, heard only by the sun and the sea." This line captures the paradox of women's expression in patriarchal contexts: they are allowed to speak, but not to be heard. True feminist awakening thus requires not just speaking, but insisting on audibility. As Audre Lorde asserts, "your silence will not protect you"

Advance Journal of Management and Social Sciences
Adv. J. Man. Soc. Sci
Volume: 9; Issue: 04,
July-August, 2025
ISSN: 2383 – 6355
Impact Factor: 6.76
Advance Scholars Publication
Published by International Institute of Advance Scholars Development
https://aspjournals.org/Journals/index.php/ajmss/index

(Sister Outsider 42). Both poems internalize this ethos.

The use of fragmented, non-linear structure in both texts also reflects the instability of a voice breaking out of silence. Plath's shifts between metaphor, memory, and myth mirror a psychological turbulence that rejects coherence in favor of emotional authenticity. Sinclair's enjambments and refusal of punctuation similarly convey a voice unraveling and reconstructing itself. This resistance to conventional literary order is part of what Hélène Cixous calls "writing the body"—a feminine textuality that defies rational, masculine grammar in favor of a more fluid, embodied discourse (Cixous 204).

Another important element in both poems is the cultural normalization of male dominance in everyday speech. Sinclair writes, "His words are a bible we don't recall reading," revealing how male discourse becomes scripture—authoritative, unquestioned. Plath's "every woman adores a Fascist" delivers a biting critique of the psychological seduction of authoritarian masculinity. Both lines suggest that patriarchal language is not just overtly oppressive—it is internalized as truth. Feminist awakening, then, is a process of deconstruction: of questioning whose words we believe, and why.

In conclusion, Daddy and Ode to the Patriarchy demonstrate that the path to feminist liberation begins with disrupting the grammar of silence and apology. These poems model what it looks like to speak rage, to unlearn subservience, and to reclaim the right to expression without self-censorship. Their speakers begin in muteness and end in fire—proof that the feminist voice, once awakened, cannot return to sleep.

Empirical Review

The empirical review draws on critical essays, scholarly articles, and creative works that explore themes of patriarchal dismantling, poetic rebellion, and the radical feminist voice. These sources are selected not just for their relevance to Sylvia Plath's Daddy and Ashley Sinclair's Ode to the Patriarchy, but also for the broader conversations they generate about poetic language, feminist ideology, and structural resistance. Together, they highlight how women poets use literary form and thematic intensity to challenge male-dominated systems of power.

Several literary critics have offered extensive readings of Daddy within feminist and psychoanalytic frameworks. Jacqueline Rose's essay in The Haunting of Sylvia Plath positions Daddy as a work that destabilizes the boundary between the personal and the political. She writes, "Plath's violence is not irrational but calculated, a performative disintegration of the father's hold on language and authority" (Rose 112). This reading reinforces the notion that Plath's poetic rage is strategic, not hysterical. In the same vein, Christina Britzolakis contends that Plath

Advance Journal of Management and Social Sciences
Adv. J. Man. Soc. Sci
Volume: 9; Issue: 04,
July-August, 2025
ISSN: 2383 – 6355
Impact Factor: 6.76
Advance Scholars Publication
Published by International Institute of Advance Scholars Development
https://aspjournals.org/Journals/index.php/ajmss/index

"ritualizes trauma through grotesque metaphor to reclaim psychic autonomy" (Sylvia Plath and the Theatre of Mourning 89). These perspectives affirm that Daddy operates not as a personal tantrum, but as a radical act of literary reclamation.

In the broader canon of feminist poetry, Adrienne Rich's poem Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law offers a powerful comparative anchor. Rich, like Plath, explores the emotional labor imposed on women and the intellectual constraints of domesticity. The poem's opening—"You once held me / on your knees / I was so delicate / you must have been afraid"—resonates with Plath's childlike imagery in Daddy ("I have lived like a foot"). Both poets depict a transition from infantilized silence to hardened resistance. As Rich herself argued in On Lies, Secrets, and Silence, "When a woman tells the truth, she is creating the possibility for more truth around her" (Rich 285). This idea supports the core thesis of rebellion and reclamation in radical feminist poetics.

Ashley Sinclair's Ode to the Patriarchy, while less extensively critiqued in scholarly discourse, has found resonance in feminist digital culture and contemporary poetic spaces. The poem's inclusion in zines and platforms such as Gal-Demand Feminist Voices reflects its relevance in Generation Z feminist expression. In her blog interview with The White Pube, Sinclair explains, "I was tired of apologizing for taking up space. This poem was my scream." The reception of her work among younger feminists aligns with recent studies on digital feminism, such as Alison Phipps' Me, Not You: The Trouble with Mainstream Feminism, which analyzes how online activism reshapes expressions of female anger and vulnerability (Phipps 63). Sinclair's poetic method—disruptive, unapologetic, and emotionally urgent—mirrors the demands of 21st-century feminist critique.

Moreover, Sinclair's stylistic choices are echoed in the spoken word tradition. Writers like Warsan Shire (Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth) and Dominique Christina (The Period Poem) similarly merge poetic form with feminist politics to confront bodily shame and gendered violence. Christina's refrain "I'm sorry if my blood offended you" parallels Sinclair's exploration of the apology as a gendered reflex. These parallels suggest that Ode to the Patriarchy fits squarely within the growing tradition of feminist resistance poetry that centers the body, emotion, and voice as weapons of truth.

From a transdisciplinary perspective, theorists like Sara Ahmed provide valuable insight into the politics of female speech. In Living a Feminist Life, Ahmed describes how feminist declarations are often received as aggression: "We are taught that being angry is to be unreasonable, and so the angry woman becomes a figure of disorder" (Ahmed 166). Both Plath and Sinclair embody

Advance Journal of Management and Social Sciences
Adv. J. Man. Soc. Sci
Volume: 9; Issue: 04,
July-August, 2025
ISSN: 2383 – 6355
Impact Factor: 6.76
Advance Scholars Publication
Published by International Institute of Advance Scholars Development
https://aspjournals.org/Journals/index.php/ajmss/index

this figure and invert its logic. Their poems embrace disorder to reveal deeper systemic violences. Ahmed's analysis lends empirical legitimacy to the affective labor that both poets perform—transforming emotional pain into intellectual critique.

The findings of the reception of the radical feminist texts are also ontologically informed thus emphasising the gendered nature of reception. Critics of Daddy have often described Plath as being heavy-handed but this was not a criticism that was very often leveled at male poets dealing with either war or trauma. Likewise, Sinclair has also been disadvantaged as a poet due to her work being written off as too political or angry apparently, the latter adjective can also lead to the dismissal of male poets, but only when they choose to write about or criticise female structures and female artists. These objections themselves are proof of the empirical necessity of poetical revolt. According to the analysis by bell hooks, speaking as a female subject was dangerous not to mention the risk of being silenced or annihilated especially when it came to subversion of the patriarchal order (hooks 19).

Taken as a whole, these academic works, literary texts, and criticism make Daddy and Ode to the Patriarchy more than simple outbursts, but instead are a part of a long tradition of writing about patriarchal violence using uncompromising language. They demonstrate that poetry is not aesthetic alone--it is of the order of epistemology and politics. It exposes, denies, and reconstructs.

Theoretical Framework

Radical Feminist Theory

This study is anchored in Radical Feminist Theory, which provides both a conceptual lens and methodological guide for analyzing the dismantling of patriarchal authority and the violent language of female resistance in Sylvia Plath's Daddyand Ashley Sinclair's Ode to the Patriarchy. Emerging prominently in the 1960s and 1970s through the works of theorists such as Kate Millett, Shulamith Firestone, Andrea Dworkin, and Catharine MacKinnon, radical feminism contends that patriarchy is the root system of all gender-based oppression—not incidental, but institutional, cultural, and psychological in nature. For radical feminists, liberation requires not reforming patriarchy but abolishing it altogether. This ideology aligns with the thematic and stylistic imperatives of both Plath and Sinclair, whose poems do not negotiate with patriarchal structures but aim to destroy them through linguistic defiance and symbolic rupture.

Kate Millett's seminal text Sexual Politics defines the core of radical feminist thought: "Patriarchy's chief institution is the family, and its foundation is the power of men over women" (Millett 33). In Daddy, Plath dramatizes the familial as a space of totalitarian control, where

Advance Journal of Management and Social Sciences
Adv. J. Man. Soc. Sci
Volume: 9; Issue: 04,
July-August, 2025
ISSN: 2383 – 6355
Impact Factor: 6.76
Advance Scholars Publication
Published by International Institute of Advance Scholars Development
https://aspjournals.org/Journals/index.php/ajmss/index

the father's death does not end his dominance. He remains a ghostly symbol of masculine power—"a bag full of God"—which the speaker must exorcise. Millett's theory helps contextualize this symbolic patricide as a political act, not simply a personal psychological process. The poem is thus not merely about grieving a dead father; it is about rejecting the structure that allows that father to remain omnipotent.

Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon expand radical feminist critique to language and culture, asserting that patriarchy is embedded in the very fabric of discourse, literature, and social interaction. MacKinnon argues in Toward a Feminist Theory of the State that "male power is systemic; it permeates everything" (MacKinnon 106). Sinclair's poem reflects this saturation, depicting patriarchy not as a single man but as a diffuse force "braided into our pigtails, subconsciously engraved in our fingertips." The apology, the silence, the expectation to laugh at misogynistic jokes—all become daily rituals of submission. Sinclair's refusal to apologize and her rejection of patriarchal "scripture" embody MacKinnon's call for resistance through linguistic disruption.

Radical feminist theory also challenges aesthetic norms by encouraging women to reject the standards of male-centered literature. As Shulamith Firestone states in The Dialectic of Sex, "The power of men over women is not merely physical—it is creative. They control the image of woman in culture" (Firestone 45). In response, Plath and Sinclair write against that image. Plath's "boot in the face" and Sinclair's "salty tears forming a river" are not intended to be beautiful—they are meant to be brutal, real, and confrontational. Their language is violent because their experiences are violent. The refusal to beautify suffering is a core principle of radical feminist art.

The methodology of this study draws directly from the implications of radical feminist theory. The poems are analyzed as acts of resistance within a patriarchal linguistic and cultural system. Rather than interpreting metaphor for symbolic meaning alone, this approach views metaphor as political intervention. When Plath writes, "If I've killed one man, I've killed two," she does not only express anger—she performs an execution of patriarchal dominance through literary form. When Sinclair writes, "Dinner is waiting, and your coffee is getting cold," she juxtaposes domestic servitude with poetic resistance, exposing how patriarchy hides within everyday expectations. These are acts of poetic sabotage.

Radical feminist theory also demands that we view female rage not as an excess, but as a truth-telling force. Bell hooks affirms this when she writes in Talking Back, "To transgress boundaries imposed by patriarchal thought is to engage in a revolutionary act of speech" (hooks

Advance Journal of Management and Social Sciences
Adv. J. Man. Soc. Sci
Volume: 9; Issue: 04,
July-August, 2025
ISSN: 2383 – 6355
Impact Factor: 6.76
Advance Scholars Publication
Published by International Institute of Advance Scholars Development
https://aspjournals.org/Journals/index.php/ajmss/index

29). Both Plath and Sinclair transgress—Plath by breaking poetic decorum and invoking fascist imagery, Sinclair by rejecting structural order and demanding to be heard. Their poems are not merely expressive; they are insurgent.

In conclusion, radical feminist theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding Daddy and Ode to the Patriarchy not only as poetic texts, but as feminist acts of revolt. Through its focus on the systemic nature of patriarchy and the transformative power of female voice, the theory affirms the central argument of this paper: that rebellion and reclamation are not abstract ideals but embodied linguistic practices that challenge the core of gendered oppression.

Textual Analysis

Sylvia Plath's Daddy is a ferocious act of literary patricide that uses metaphor, repetition, and historical trauma to reject paternal control. The speaker's opening line, "You do not do, you do not do / anymore, black shoe," introduces the father figure not as a man, but as a suffocating structure in which the speaker has lived "like a foot" (Plath). This image conveys immobilization and reduction, positioning the speaker as passive and entrapped. The tone is accusatory, and the repetitive diction mimics both nursery rhyme and incantation—suggesting both childhood dependency and ritualistic exorcism. As the poem progresses, the imagery escalates. The father becomes a Nazi, a vampire, a fascist, and finally a corpse with "a stake in your fat black heart." These violent metaphors function as acts of reclamation, enabling the speaker to annihilate the cultural and psychological scripts imposed by patriarchal authority.

The invocation of Holocaust imagery—"I think I may well be a Jew… A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen"—has sparked critical discomfort, but within the radical feminist framework, this rhetorical extremity signals the psychic violence of living under male dominance (Plath). The father is not simply oppressive—he is totalitarian. His control is not isolated to the domestic space but encompasses the speaker's entire existence. This reflects what radical feminists like Catharine MacKinnon identify as "a total system of power, embedded in every domain of life" (Toward a Feminist Theory of the State 113). The final lines of the poem—"Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through"—serve as both a curse and a closure, marking the speaker's break from inherited silence and paternal worship.

Ashley Sinclair's Ode to the Patriarchy, by contrast, confronts a broader and more diffuse patriarchal force. Rather than focusing on a singular paternal figure, Sinclair targets the everyday rituals and internalized habits that condition women into submission. The poem begins with hunger and injustice, aligning the speaker's body with those of "the women of the world." This global identification echoes the

Advance Journal of Management and Social Sciences
Adv. J. Man. Soc. Sci
Volume: 9; Issue: 04,
July-August, 2025
ISSN: 2383 – 6355
Impact Factor: 6.76
Advance Scholars Publication
Published by International Institute of Advance Scholars Development
https://aspjournals.org/Journals/index.php/ajmss/index

collectivist spirit of second- and third-wave feminism, asserting that the speaker's rage is not personal, but systemic. Her language is raw and deliberately unpolished: "Spit it out! Spit it out!" she commands, rejecting the internalization of patriarchal messages that creep into female socialization through appearance, behavior, and speech.

Sinclair's use of repetition—particularly of "sorry"—is a radical inversion of feminine politeness. The apology becomes a haunting refrain: "I apologise profusely, accidentally… It drips from my mouth, unstoppable, uncontrollable." In radical feminist terms, this repetition reflects how women's voices are colonized by patriarchy. As Sara Ahmed writes, "A woman's no is often heard as a yes that has yet to be converted" (Living a Feminist Life 89). Sinclair's refusal to end the poem with compliance—"Let us conjure a new reality for a while"—offers instead a call to feminist re-imagination. While Plath uses violent metaphor to kill the patriarch, Sinclair uses defiant articulation to expose and rewire the codes of subjugation.

Structurally, both poems resist traditional poetic conventions. Plath's tight quatrains and sing-song rhythm ironically juxtapose the violent content, creating a dissonance that mirrors internal conflict. This stylistic discipline enhances the speaker's sense of control as she dismantles her oppressor. In contrast, Sinclair's fragmented free verse mirrors the chaos of psychological revolt. Her enjambments and lack of punctuation generate a breathless urgency, mimicking the panic and suffocation she describes. These formal choices reflect the radical feminist principle that content and form must align—that poetic language must itself rebel against patriarchal aesthetics.

Both poems center on voice—its suppression, distortion, and ultimate reclamation. Plath's speaker states, "I never could talk to you. The tongue stuck in my jaw." This literal inability to speak reflects a broader feminist silence, enforced by patriarchal expectation and emotional intimidation. When she later writes, "The voices just can't worm through," the metaphor of blocked communication becomes both political and psychological. Sinclair's speaker similarly begins in breathless silence—"I suffocate, spiralling, gasping"—but ends in invocation: "We rise again." This shared arc from muteness to voice illustrates the radical feminist belief in language as liberation.

Finally, both Daddy and Ode to the Patriarchy are acts of poetic refusal. Plath refuses forgiveness or reconciliation. Sinclair refuses invisibility and complicity. Each poem represents a moment of feminist rupture—a refusal to participate in the narratives that have defined womanhood as obedient, pretty, or passive. In this way, both poets reclaim the page as a battlefield, their metaphors as weapons, and

Advance Journal of Management and Social Sciences
Adv. J. Man. Soc. Sci
Volume: 9; Issue: 04,
July-August, 2025
ISSN: 2383 – 6355
Impact Factor: 6.76
Advance Scholars Publication
Published by International Institute of Advance Scholars Development
https://aspjournals.org/Journals/index.php/ajmss/index

their voices as acts of war. Through literary insurgency, they dismantle not only the patriarch but also the inner structures of shame, guilt, and silence he installs.

Summary

Sylvia Plath's Daddy and Ashley Sinclair's Ode to the Patriarchy show some interesting intersections of radical feminist ideas and the poetic structure. Both poems offer pure pieces of literary activism that demand to take action against the patriarchal dictatorship by exercising the power of the female voice/metaphor and rage. The symbolic patricide in both works, that is, the rejection of the father figure itself, literal or institutional, is at the center of the two works. By contrast, in Daddy, the speaker renders the patriarchal ghost extinct through words, branding him a vampire and a Fascist, and finally stabbing metaphorically through his heart like a stake. This is not only personal catharsis, but is rather a symbolic killing of patriarchal dominance. In the same way, the Sinclair speaker is faced with a more intangible, though no less insidious, invincible paternal figure the framework of daily social and cultural orders which teaches the woman to submit. Her form of defiance is less forceful, but no less powerful, through the use of language robbing these patriarchal rituals of their supposed authority.

The other significant discovery is that of using violent and visceral language in a deliberately active mode of feminine resistance. The aggression, both in diction and form, is not used by both of these poets to demonstrate spectacle, but as a means of disruption. The poem by Lath is full of metaphorical violence as it compares the father to totalitarianism and historical horrors. The lines by Sinclair are fresher and more colloquial, yet they still have the same blistering effect; such lines as "Spit it out!" or "We rise again!" strike a chord with the massiveness of present-day feminist activism. Their poetic aggression is not unnecessary but strategic-- a response to break the aesthetic rules that have required women to be gentle writers, to write as often with apology as allusion, or remain silent.

Imperative is the theme of silence and its language counterpart, apology, in the two writings. Examining the word sorry as a reflex, which Sinclair claims women cannot help but trigger, reveals the self-conditioning in women to shrink. Lath reiterates this silencing of voice through her speaker saying, again, "The tongue stuck in my jaw." These scenes are extremely revelatory: they reveal not only how patriarchy occupies the external realm, through power, but how the patriarchy penetrates the internal realm, through speech. The two poets demonstrate that feminist awakening starts with the realization of the existence of such silence- and ends in breaking it.

Also important is the fact that poetic voice becomes a revolutionary tool. This mother-daughter struggle is used as a metaphor for

Advance Journal of Management and Social Sciences
Adv. J. Man. Soc. Sci
Volume: 9; Issue: 04,
July-August, 2025
ISSN: 2383 – 6355
Impact Factor: 6.76
Advance Scholars Publication
Published by International Institute of Advance Scholars Development
https://aspjournals.org/Journals/index.php/ajmss/index

feminist liberation, once voiceless they are now articulate. In Daddy, the speaker reaches rage-based action after a journey that starts with she is feeling characterized by suffocated grief and ends with she is done characterized by rejection. The speaker in the poem starts out suffocating and finishes by rallying together. Speaking, particularly out of anger, turns into a feminist protest against conventional concepts of femininity and decorum. The reclamation of space occurs through this voice, gritty, suffocating, bloody, the voice that the two poems angrily declare.

Lastly, the research ascertains that the radical feminist theory is most suitable for examining the texts. The two poems dismiss the offers of appeasement and insist on the reformation, not bargaining, with the patriarchal order. They not only oppose oppression but also its aesthetics. In this way, their rebellion is wholesome- they attack ideology, language, form, and emotion. By way of their poetry, both Plath and Sinclair transform the history of poetry not as a correlation of powers, but as revolution- an assertion that the ancient gods die and that in their place, new rules of female agency must be created.

Finally, the two poems are not poems alone, Daddy and Ode to the Patriarchy are manifestos. They are literary testimonies to female rage and strength, which have been long overdue to say no more. Their words- determined, dislocated, and defiant-conjure alternative grammars of resistance and new vocabularies of power. Radical feminist theory enables us to not only hear such voices, but to hear them not as exceptions but as needed interruptions to a world which demands deference on the part of females.

In a culture where these patriarchal values continue to influence language, culture, and sense of identity, the poems provide a lot more than a catharsis-they are a call to action. They remind us that as a woman to write against the stream of patriarchy is to say: We rise again.

Reference

Ahmed, Sara. Living a Feminist Life. Duke University Press, 2017.

Britzolakis, Christina. Sylvia Plath and the Theatre of Mourning. Oxford University Press, 1999.

Butler, Judith. Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative. Routledge, 1997.

Cixous, Hélène. “The Laugh of the Medusa.” Signs, vol. 1, no. 4, 1976, pp. 875–893.

Firestone, Shulamith. The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution. William Morrow, 1970.

Hooks, bell. Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black. South End Press, 1989.

Advance Journal of Management and Social Sciences
Adv. J. Man. Soc. Sci
Volume: 9; Issue: 04,
July-August, 2025
ISSN: 2383 – 6355
Impact Factor: 6.76
Advance Scholars Publication
Published by International Institute of Advance Scholars Development
https://aspjournals.org/Journals/index.php/ajmss/index

Lorde, Audre. Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches. Crossing Press, 2007.

MacKinnon, Catharine A. toward a Feminist Theory of the State. Harvard University Press, 1989.

Millett, Kate. Sexual Politics. Columbia University Press, 2016.

Phipps, Alison. Me, Not You: The Trouble with Mainstream Feminism. Manchester University Press, 2020.

Plath, Sylvia. "Daddy." Ariel, Harper & Row, 1965.

Rich, Adrienne. On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966–1978. W. W. Norton, 1979.

Rose, Jacqueline. The Haunting of Sylvia Plath. Harvard University Press, 1991.

Sinclair, Ashley. "Ode to the Patriarchy." Gal-Dem, 2019. (If available in print or online publication. If unpublished, format as: Ashley Sinclair. Ode to the Patriarchy. Unpublished poem.)