

Sylvia plath: "daddy"



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The poem "Daddy" uses language to a great effect to express the bitterness and frustration endured by the writer Sylvia Plath after the traumatic death of her father. Sylvia's father Otto Plath was a German immigrant who was a professor at Boston University teaching biology and German. It was said that Otto always wanted a son and when Warren, Sylvia's brother, was born two years later she began to pine for her father's attention. As a young girl, she was an excellent student and gained many prizes and was very charming and popular however she was also very desperate to redeem herself to her "daddy". She writes about how she felt as she struggled to live up to the high standards set for her by her "arrogant" father. As we interpret this poem, not only are we, as the readers, reading the emotions, but begin to feel them.

The frequent use of the word black throughout the poem conveys a feeling of gloom and suffocation: black shoe, so black no sky..., blackboard, black man etc.

In the first stanza, Sylvia reveals to us her own "so-called" status compared to her father." Any more, black shoe  
In which I have lived like a foot..."

Stanza 1, line 2.

This gives us the image of a big, black shoe with a small foot inside. It is a metaphor for her father, the shoe, and of her, the foot. By disclosing the condition of the relationship between her and her father, we become aware of what we are actually going to be reading about. We often associate shoes with stepping and stamping and this is probably what Sylvia experienced from her father. How he may have stamped on her confidence.

Later on in the poem she compares her father to the German Air Force and Hitler, himself: "With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo And your neat mustache" Stanza 9 line 2 The Luftwaffe was from the World War 2 that caused severe devastation. The image of a bomb dropping from the plane on its victims could be seen as a contrast to the pressure and pride of her father killing Sylvia's confidence. This would have enraged her. The use of the word "gobbledygoo" could be describing the German language in this case as Sylvia may not have understood what her father was saying. When Sylvia specifies the "neat mustache" she may have comparing her father to Hitler, seeming as he has a neat mustache, but not only to his profile but perhaps his stern arrogance.

However, although her father was a German, this had no bearing on the fact that his attitude resembled that of Hitler's. She gives us a short description of her father using metaphorical language. She uses strong images throughout the poem. The words "a bag full of God" conveys the omniscience of her father's authority and the heaviness it weighed on her throughout her life. When girls look up to their fathers they perhaps see a God-like image. This was probably what Sylvia felt.

Also, in lines 8-10 when Sylvia says: "Marble-heavy, a bag full of God, Ghastly statue with one gray toe, Big as a Frisco seal." Stanza 2 lines 3-5 Sylvia is portraying her father as a statue made up of marble. Marble is cold and hard and when in the form of a statue it is lifeless without feeling. The reason for her feeling this way towards her father was probably due to the lack of response from her father and how he never really communed with her.

She also uses other symbolism depicting his lack of communication with her when she writes: "So I could never tell where you put your foot, your root. I could never talk to you. The tongue stuck in my jaw. It stuck in a barb wire snare.

"Stanza 4 lines 2-5/Stanza 4 line 1 She is constantly referring back to Germany and the War. The "barb wire" was from the concentration camps and the Holocaust." And the language obscene, An engine, an engine, Chuffing me off like a Jew." Stanzas 6-7 The obscenity may be referring to her feelings towards her father. Sylvia uses the theme of the war to depict how minute she feels inferior compared to her father and how she is dominated by him.

The repetition of the word engine gives a sense of rhythm and allows the reader to picture a train smoking on a rail. The symbolic places which she mentions are where the concentration camps were set up. "...

Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen." Stanza 7 line 3. As Sylvia incorporates further into her poem the theme of Hitler and the Jews, she gives us an insight of her hatred to her father. She displays her fear of the Nazi army by stating: "I have always been scared of you"- her father.

He is then sketched as a Panzer-man with a bright blue, Aryan eye wearing a swastika in the Luftwaffe. She feels compassionate towards the Polish and Jewish people. Probably because she feels like one of them, herself. Then, when she uses repetition of the word "brute" in stanza 9, she expresses her rage. She may have used a slightly sarcastic tone when she says that "every

woman adores a Fascist". Sylvia then talks about her suicide attempt and her being rescued.

"Tried to die and get back, back, back to you." They pulled me out of the sack, and they stuck me together with glue," Clearly meaning she was saved from death at her own hand. The sense of rhyme may suggest this desperation and longing. She also shows her desperation for communication with her father when she says: "The voices just can't worm through".

When I think of voices through a telephone wire, I can never really imagine them worming through. It is a strange comparison. It, in a sense makes a person feel for Sylvia, and how perhaps maybe these voices are haunting as they squirm through. She shows signs that she is beginning to feel less resentment for her father however not fully. Sylvia talks about her husband to her father in the poem and how he drank her blood for a year but it was actually seven years. The year was the affair Ted Hughes had and the seven years was the marriage.

She compares him to a vampire and then compares her father to one. By doing this she makes us empathise with her. She says: "A stake in your fat black heart". Sylvia uses assonance to emphasise her ongoing emotion: fat black.

When read out aloud the words sound ruthless and almost sinister. Then she ends the poem by declaring the final straw: "Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through." She is finally through with his expectations and him. Her words are cold but meaningful in a sense because she has finally gotten over him; his arrogance and superiority. The effect of addressing him as "daddy"

throughout the poem may be reflecting upon her inner child longing for her “daddy”.