

Poetic analysis of to a sad daughter written by michael ondaatje essay sample

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The poem, "To a Sad Daughter" written by Michael Ondaatje, sends a powerful message regarding a father's love, and his hockey idolizing daughter. Through analysis it is clear that Ondaatje does not use many overt poetic devices, but his subtle figurative language and specific word choice makes for an extremely effective poem. His decision to use common language and keep it simple helps to relate and understand his emotions for his daughter. In order to make the connection between the author's motive in the poem, and its effectiveness through analysis- one must first understand the context of the poem.

The poem appears to be written by a single father, to his only child (daughter), in hopes to help "you delicately step into the wild world" (62-63). She is certainly not the most typical sixteen year old girl; she idolizes a predominantly male sport and actually enjoys the aspect of "cuts and wounds- all this pleases you" (6-7). The father asks his daughter to be patient with him as he tries to open up and explain real life and all its possibilities to her: "I'd rather be your closest friend than your father, I'm not good at advice you know that, but ride the ceremonies until they grow dark." (39-43). The father reveals his unconditional love for his daughter early in the poem, "I like all your faults even your purple moods" (15-16) and is clear that nothing means more to him than his daughter. Ondaatje describes these feelings as "like" instead of "love" for his daughter, only to avoid her from being embarrassment. Ondaatje later reestablishes his aspirations for his daughter to go fully through life and "Step delicately / into the wild world / and your real prize will be / the frantic search. / Want everything. If you break / break going out not in." (65-70). He explains to his daughter that she

must strive to reach her

potential in life, and that it is better to go out after something and fail, than not trying at all. Ondaatje has clear originality in his work, but it can be most appreciated when connected with his subtle use of poetic devices, figurative language and style.

“ To a Sad Daughter” is a free verse poem written in first person narration from the father’s point of view; it has eight stanzas and does not follow any rhyme scheme. The poet has a difficult task of writing about a unique experience that only a father-daughter can share; it is extremely effective being written in free verse because the family bond is not governed by rules or structure, so neither should the poem. Ondaatje establishes flow with sentence-like poetry and has good use of alliteration for smooth reading (Answers. com): “ One day I’ll come swimming / beside your ship or someone will / and if you hear the siren / listen to it.” (26-29), and also in, “ One afternoon I stepped / into your room.

You were sitting / at the desk where I now write this. / Forsythia outside with window / and sun spilled over you / like a thick yellow miracle” (51-56).

Ondaatje’s repetitive use of the consonance “ s” is clearly alliteration at work, the short lines roll softly off the tongue. He uses the repetition of “ ah” sounds in, “ When I thought of daughters I wasn’t expecting this” (12-13), this is the use of assonance to help again with flow and pace of reading (Answers. com). Ondaatje captures intense emotion with the use of a hyperbole when the father states: “ I’ll sell my arms for you” (70). Another

aspect of Ondaatje's word choice in the poem is his various uses of imagery in the poem.

Ondaatje's first use of imagery is also in the same quotations as his first example of alliteration (26-29); "sirens" were mythical creatures that used their sweet song to lure

sailors to their island eventually getting lodged on rocks near the shore (Answers. com). The father gives untraditional advice to his daughter by telling her to head toward this. In the following lines he states, "For if you close your ears / only nothing happens. You will never change." (29-30) explaining how change is necessary and essential for growing. In the last stanza the author combines a use of imagery and a metaphor when the father shifts conversation from the perspective of life, and attempts to explain death. "If I speak of death / it is without answers" (72, 74), "Don't recall graves. / Memory is permanent. / Remember the afternoon's / yellow suburban annunciation. /

Your goalie / in his frightening mask / dreams perhaps / of gentleness." (78-85). The father tells his daughter that death is the end of everyone's life, he warns her to not get stuck in remembering graves of others that pass away, but for her to be strong and "see" the real images of life (Answers. com). This stanza paints a picture of people grieving over the loss of loved ones and how difficult it can be to stop remembering those vivid graves. Ondaatje, with his use of the more abstract poetic devices, has created a wonderful poem that is extremely effective.

Although Michael Ondaatje's poem, "To a Sad Daughter" at first may appear to lack the "essential" rhyme scheme and structure that so many poems follow, but through analysis Ondaatje's originality and subtle use of poetic devices combined for very effective poem. His special attention to word choice and flow of sentences had a major impact on the quality of writing, and eventually it's on influence the reader. The uniqueness between a father-daughter relationship, and also the unconditional love that Ondaatje has demonstrated in his poem through his writing, is truly something special.

Works Cited

Anonymous, "To a Sad Daughter analysis". 2006 .

Ondaatje, Michael. To a Sad Daughter analysis. Toronto: Thomson-Nelson, 2006.