

# Lacan's mirror stage and fun home



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The graphic novel *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel opens with a series of panels portraying how she and her father used to play airplane. At the same time, Bechdel makes a connection between them playing airplane and the myth of Icarus and Daedalus. It is important to note that what Alison and her father are doing in this scene is role-playing. One of them has to be the support while the other one flies. It is a role-playing game, but nevertheless a game, and both of them appear very serious while playing it. Alison gets to fly, just as Icarus, while playing this game, but that is not necessarily true in their daily lives outside the airplane game. Bechdel says that “in [their] particular re-enactment of this mythic relationship, it was not [her], but [her] father who was to plummet from the sky” (Bechdel p. 4). This puts into question who of them is the father in their relationship. The mixed-up parallels between Alison, her father, Icarus, and Daedalus highlight the unclear relationship of power between Alison and her dad.

The conflicts between them were almost always caused by her father trying to solve his personal problems through her. He wants her to dress very feminine because that is something that he never got to do. He fails to acknowledge that her daughter is also going through stuff of her own. Instead of playing the role of a father, he is putting all the pressure on Alison to be his and her own father at the same time. The father gets to fly as Icarus supported by Alison as Daedalus constantly and Alison can't keep up with that. Whenever Alison wants to open up to her father, the conversation turns toward her father's issues. During the scene in the car (p. 220), after Alison tries to find out if her father knew she was gay all this time, his father only focuses on himself and dismisses Alison's questions. The book that she

thought he was trying to give her as a guide for self-discovery was actually a way of introducing himself. Because in the end, everything was about him. That is when Bechdel questions which of them was the father because she is doing all the parental listening (p. 221).

Bechdel concludes the novel with a scene at the pool playing with his father (p. 230-32). While the scene is going on, she narrates her own reasoning regarding paternity and her relationship with her father. It was not as simple as her being the father to her own father. Their relationship was tricky and they both, especially the father, benefited from each other to find out their own identities. Bechdel tries to uncover to the reader the nature of their relationship by juxtaposing the pool scene with both Ulysses and the legend of Icarus. She feels like her father sacrificed a lot that did not belong to him for his own sake, just as Joyce sacrificed Beach's financial stability for Ulysses (p. 230-1). At the same time, his father was Icarus and flied too close to the sun, but " he was always there to catch [Alison] when [she] leapt" (p. 232). The novel ends with them playing in the pool together, as expressionless as when they played airplane.

This unclear relationship is further distorted by Bechdel's act of writing a story about her father, in which she has ultimate control over how she crafts his character. Taking into consideration Lacan's Mirror Stage, Alison's father establishes his ego as fundamentally dependent upon external objects or others. Through books, he creates an " ideal" self of who he thinks he is or should be. As the idea he has in his head does not coincide with his experiences, he needs Alison to fill that inconsistency. He dressed Alison very femininely when she was a little girl because that is who he wanted to

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be. His idea self or identity is within those books and not in his person, that is why he introduces himself by giving Alison the books that have helped him form his identity or his imagos. The father's encounter with the "other" ends up being in books and sometimes other men, that makes him unable to be himself with his own family and strains and distorts his relationship with Alison.

The parallels that Alison makes between her and her father, and Icarus and Daedalus are no longer parallels. They are a far more complicated than the initial simplistic comparison. The confusion that Bechdel creates about who is who throughout the novel reflects her own confusion regarding her relationship with her father. The fact that us as readers cannot get closure is also representative of Bechdel's anxiety of never getting an answer herself.