

# DADDY

## CRITICAL ANALYSIS

This poem is a very strong expression of resentment against the male domination of women and also the violence of all kinds for which man is responsible. The speaker expresses her rage against her 'daddy', but daddy himself is a symbol of male.

As well as a symbol of more general agents and forces like science and reason, violence and war, the German and their Hitler, and all other "inhuman" agents of oppression in the world. The speaker is also a symbol of female and the creative force, humility, love and humanity in general.

This poem can also be analyzed from a psychological point of view. It is the outpour of a neurotic anger through the channel of creative art, or poetry. It is a kind of therapy. The poem is also significant for its assonance, allusion and images. Though it is slightly autobiographical, the poem must be interpreted symbolically and psychologically without limiting it to the poetess's life and experiences also.

The poem begins with the angry attack on daddy: "you", "black shoe", "I have had to kill you". The name -calling continues: daddy is a ghostly statue, a seal, a German, Hitler himself, a man-crushing engine, a tank driver (Panzer man), a swastika symbol of the Nazi, a devil, a haunting ghost and vampire, and so on. The speaker has lived for thirty years, poor and white, as in the Nazi concentration camps of the Second World War. She is not able to breathe or express her pain. Her tongue is stuck in her jaw, or in the barbell wires. She is always scared of daddy or the German images of terror. She feels like a Jew herself. She feels she is crushed under the roller as the Polish were killed by the German in 1941.

She is afraid of the German language that is obscene and vague. She remembers the concentration camps like Dachau, Auschwitz and Belsen where thousands of Jews were tortured and killed. She feels she is a descendant of a gypsy ancestress (ancient mother). She is afraid of the neat mustache like that of Hitler, and the Aryan eye. The image of a boot in the face comes to her troubled mind. She thinks her daddy had a brutish (savage) black heart. She remembers the image of a strict teacher near the blackboard, which is also her father's image. She was ten when he died. But she wanted to kill him again, and throw him out of her mind. She also tried to die

herself, but they prevented her. Then she made an effigy or (model) of him and killed it. She had killed him and his vampire that drank her blood for seven years. She claims that all the villagers also hated and still hate him. So, he can go back and die forever. She calls him a bastard.

The extremity of anger in this poem is not justifiable as something possible with a normal person in real life. We should understand that this is partly due to the neurosis that Plath was actually suffering from. Besides, it is essential to understand from the psychoanalytical point of view, the poem does not literally express reality alone: it is the relieving anger and frustration, and an alternative outlet of the neurotic energy in the form of poetic expression. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand the anger as being directed against the general forces of inhumanity, violence and destruction only symbolized by 'daddy'. In fact, Plath's father loved her very much when she was a child, before he died when she was only eight. So her death was always a shock to her. But, while she felt tortured and destitute without her father, she also felt suppressed by her father's dominating image. The idea is mixed and complex. She said, "He was an autocrat... I adored and despaired him, and I probably wished many times that he were dead". The poem moves far beyond the father-daughter team if we read carefully. By a process of association and surrealism, the protest moves from father to Hitler and then to inhumanity and oppression. Sylvia Plath also said that "the personal experience is very important, but... I believe (poetry) should be relevant to larger things such as Hiroshima and Dachau and so on." This means that the frustration and anger against a dominating father who left her a destitute has here become a starting point or central symbol for larger issues including Hitler, torture and inhumanity. The poem is, therefore, also about the victimization of modern war. The poem is only slightly autobiographical, but it is more general.

The theme of female protest is perhaps the most striking symbolic meaning in the poem. The female speaker represents the creative force and she is angry with the destructive forces symbolized by her daddy and the male. But, we should also see the poem as a psychological poem that allows the speaker to relieve her neurotic energy through the channel of creativity. The speaker says, "I'm through", meaning "I'm satisfied" at the end. She is relieved. The allusions of the Second World War are all real. The anger against the German, soldiers, Hitler and his Nazi party is not too much. The reader will justify this anger if he tries to imagine the inhumanity of Hitler.