Daddy

SUMMARY

The speaker begins the poem by addressing the circumstances in which she lives, saying that they are simply no longer adequate. She compares herself to a foot living inside a black shoe. For 30 years she has lived this way, deprived and without color, not even having the courage to breathe or sneeze.

The speaker then addresses her father, informing him that she has had to kill him, though she then says that he actually died before she had the chance to do so. She describes her father as being heavy as marble and like "a bag full of God," as well as like a horrifying statue with one toe that looks like a San Francisco seal—huge and gray.

Continuing the image of her father as a statue, the speaker describes his head being located in the bizarre blue-green waters of the Atlantic Ocean, near the beautiful coastal town of Nauset, Massachusetts. The speaker tells her father that she used to pray for his return from the dead, and then in German says, "Oh, you."

The speaker prayed in the German language, in a town in Poland that was utterly destroyed by endless wars, a town whose name is so common that the speaker's Polish "friend"—whom she refers to using a derogatory slur—says there must be at least twelve of them.

Because of this, she couldn't tell where her father had been, nor where exactly he came from. She couldn't talk to him. It felt as though her tongue kept getting caught in her jaw.

It was as though her tongue were stuck in a trap made of barbed wire. The speaker stutters the word "I" in German, demonstrating what it felt like to not be able to speak. She thought every German was her father. She thought the language was offensive and disgusting.

The speaker continues describing the German language, saying that it was like the engine of a train, carrying her off like a Jew to a concentration camp. She began speaking like a Jew, and then started thinking that she might in fact be a Jew.

The speaker, perhaps still imagining herself on this train, then describes the Austrian state of Tyrol and the beer of Austria's capital city as being impure and false. She then lists the other things that might make her Jewish: her Romani ancestry, her strange luck, and her tarot cards.

She has always been afraid of her father in particular, whom she associates with the German air force and who spoke words that seemed impressive at first but turned out to be nonsense. She goes on to describe his carefully groomed mustache and his blue, Aryan eyes, and then refers again to his link to the German military, this time invoking the armored vehicles used in WWII. The speaker addresses her father as "Oh, You" again, but this time in English.

Again describing her father, the speaker claims that he is not God after all, but rather a swastika—the symbol of the German Nazi regime, so opaque that no light could get through it. She then goes on to say that all women love Fascists, being stepped on brutally by someone who is a monster at heart.

The speaker then recalls a photograph of her father where he is standing in front of a blackboard. In the picture one could see that he has a cleft chin, but the speaker implies that he has the cleft feet of a devil as well. The speaker decides that her father is in fact a devil, as was the wicked man who tore her passionate heart into pieces.

The speaker was 10 years old when her father died. When she was 20, she tried to commit suicide so that she could finally be reunited with him. She thought even being buried with him would be enough.

The suicide attempt was unsuccessful, however, as she was discovered and forced into recovery. The plan having failed, she came up with another. She made a model of her father, a man in black who, like her father, looked the part of a Nazi.

This man had a love of torture. She married him. The speaker, directly addressing her father again, claims she's finally through. The telephone's unplugged and no one will be getting through to her.

The speaker reckons that if she's killed one man, she's in effect killed two. She refers to her husband as a vampire, saying that he drank her blood for a year, no, seven years. She then tells her father he can lie back now.

There's a sharp wooden post, the kind used to kill vampires, stuck through her father's heart. The speaker imagines a village in which the locals never liked her father, and so they are dancing and stomping on his body because they always knew exactly what he was. The speaker deems her father despicable and again tells him that she's finished.

THEMES

GENDER AND OPPRESSION

The poem's speaker has been enthralled by her father since childhood yet comes to realize that his legacy is one of violence and oppression. She spends the poem breaking free from his hold over her, but the poem is not solely about this one, specific relationship. Instead, the speaker's relationship to her father's memory can be thought of as representative of the broader power imbalance between men

and women in a patriarchal society, or a society in which men hold most positions of political, social, and moral authority. The poem implies that such a world subjects women to repressive rules and violence at the hands of men, limiting their autonomy, self-expression, and freedom.

The first indication that the poem is addressing patriarchy is through its title. By addressing "Daddy" (rather than "father" or "dad"), Plath immediately sets up a dynamic in which a male figure is venerated, literally located at the top of the poem, while the female speaker is infantilized; she is an adult addressing her father with a child's vocabulary, trying to communicate with him through the sing-song cadence of a nursery rhyme.

The speaker then describes the oppressive shadow of her father's memory by comparing herself to a foot that has lived inside a "black shoe ... for thirty years," too scared to even breathe. In other words, she has been completely smothered by the presence of her father, who is further described as a colossal statue, heavy as "marble" or "a bag full of God." All of these descriptors emphasize the sheer weight and breadth of the speaker's father even in memory, which seems to press down upon the speaker years after his death. This speaks to his personal hold on her, but also to the figurative force of the oppression faced by women in a male-dominated world.

Because of this oppression, the speaker has felt unable to communicate with, let alone stand up to, her father throughout her life. Not only has she "Barely dar[ed] to breathe" for thirty years, but her "tongue" has been "stuck in [her] jaw ... in a barb wire snare." This image emphasizes the sheer violence of her father's hold over her, which denies her any ability to express herself. The poem thus presents the inability to communicate as one clear byproduct of oppression.

Throughout the poem the speaker also explicitly conflates her father with the Nazis, and begins to identify herself with the Jewish people—a response which reveals her feelings of utter powerlessness against her father. The Nazis were Fascists—authoritarians who violently squashed any dissent—and this controversial comparison is meant to again highlight the brutality of her father's presence, something the speaker implies she was actually to cow to.

Indeed, the speaker even makes the extreme, seemingly offhand comment that "Every woman adores a Fascist." This not only draws attention to the power imbalance between men and women, but to the *normalization* of violence against women—violence that is so woven into every aspect of society that women can only be seen to "adore" their oppressors. In other words, this oppression is so commonplace, so accepted, that it is hard for victims to even recognize it, let alone fight back.

To that end, the speaker makes "a model" of her father and marries him. The husband is described as having "a Meinkampf look" and "a love of the rack and the screw," two images which attest to his violent and oppressive nature. This husband also becomes a "vampire," draining the speaker of blood for seven years—a metaphor for the way marriage, under patriarchy, robs a woman of any life of her own. Moving from her father to another man has done nothing to free the speaker, because she is still living within an oppressive world that treats her as subservient to the men in her life.

Only in recognizing the patriarchal violence and oppression present in her marriage and asserting that she's "finally through" can the speaker metaphorically drive a stake through her father's heart. In other words, she is not only freeing herself of her oppressive marriage, but of the kind of gendered dynamic modeled to her by her father. In this way the poem argues that the only way to fight patriarchal oppression is to recognize and expose its many, shapeshifting forms.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-80

POWER AND MYTH-MAKING

"Daddy" deals with the deification and mythologizing of authority figures. It does this through the lens of the speaker's individual relationship with her father as well as through the historic lens of the Holocaust. In order to see her father clearly, for who he really was, the speaker first needs to puncture her godlike image of him. Likewise, Nazi authority is revealed to be vulnerable—dependent on people believing in the propaganda that mythologized it. The poem demonstrates that people are subject to authoritarian power when they believe themselves to be powerless and the authority to be absolute—and that they change this dynamic by puncturing the illusions that sustain it.

Having lost her father to illness at a young age, the speaker develops an obsession with him that follows her into adulthood. The speaker's father "died before [she] had time—" to see him for who he really was, and because of this the speaker has been trapped inside a childlike perception of her father as godlike. Over the years, her memory of him seems only to have grown in its oppressive power, and she realizes she must destroy her godlike *image* of him in order to be free. She thus confesses to her father that she has had to "kill" him—or rather, the idea of him which has held her in thrall.

To do so is difficult, however. The speaker struggles to see her father clearly, saying "I never could tell where you / Put your foot, your root." This image illustrates both her father's vague identity in the speaker's mind and the speaker's sense of his omnipresence, his godlike ability to be everywhere at once—"I thought every German was you." This difficulty in pinpointing the *man* while also being surrounded by the *myth* of him speaks

to her growing understanding that to see him clearly would rob him of his power over her.

The speaker goes on to compare her relationship to her father to the relationship between Jewish people and Nazis during the Holocaust. This comparison not only illuminates her own struggle but illustrates the ways in which power and authority are vulnerable to people's belief in them.

The speaker describes being scared of her father's "Luftwaffe" and "gobbledygoo"—on the one hand, the very real physical force represented by the Luftwaffe (the German air force), and on the other hand, the mythology broadcast by their propaganda system, a mythology that—when looked at closely—was nothing but gobbledygoo (nonsense).

She also fears her father's "Aryan eye, bright blue." The singular use of "eye" refers more to a watchful, authoritarian presence than to a literal pair of eyes. Likewise, during WWII people were paralyzed by the thought of attracting Nazi attention, behaving every moment as if they were being watched, thus reinforcing Nazi control. Recognizing the fallacy of her father's power—"Not God," an actual deity, "but a swastika," an empty symbol—the speaker invokes the symbol of the Nazi regime, underlining the fact that in order for a symbol of authority to work, it has to be "So black no sky could squeak through." In other words, it must block out all light, hope, and truth. The moment one begins to see through the illusion, to the truth of what's behind it, the symbol loses its power.

Thus only when the speaker is finally able to see her father for who he is, to puncture her illusion of him as a godlike authority, does she free herself of his power. The speaker describes a picture she has of her father in which he stands at a blackboard, apparently teaching a class, a picture which points to his supposed authority. The speaker, however, finally recognizes that he is "No less a devil" just because the image conceals his true nature. The poem ends with the speaker asserting her freedom—"Daddy, daddy, you bastard I'm through"—an assertion she can make because she no longer buys into the myth of him.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-5
- Lines 6-14
- Lines 22-23
- Lines 24-28
- Line 29
- Lines 30-35
- Lines 36-37
- Lines 38-40
- Lines 41-45
- Lines 46-56
- Lines 64-67
- Lines 71-80

DEATH AND MEMORY

The speaker, traumatized by the death of her father at an early age, develops an obsession with mortality. She dreams of bringing her father back to life, and when her prayers don't work, she even tries to join him in death. When even her attempt at suicide fails, she chooses to bring her father back to life metaphorically in the form of a husband who resembles him. The poem does not seem to have an explicit stance on death, however, and instead seems more to explore the devastating effects such an obsession has on the speaker. While, on the one hand, the poem can be read as a broad call to puncture authoritarian myths and free oneself from patriarchal oppression, on a more personal level it simply speaks to the pain and confusion surrounding the death of a rather toxic parent—and perhaps to the importance of eventually moving on.

The speaker's father dies when she is just ten years old, and the trauma of this event has lingered ever since. The poem is filled with images of death and decay, as can be seen when the speaker deems her father a "Ghastly statue with one grey toe / Big as a Frisco seal." This is an allusion to Plath's real-life father, who developed gangrene of the foot and eventually died from diabetes complications. Clearly, it is the image of her father's *dying* which stays with the speaker, and therefore it is *death* on which she begins to fixate.

The speaker "pray[s]" to bring him back, as any child who has lost a parent likely would, and when that fails she attempts suicide: "At twenty I tried to die / And get back, back, back to you." She survives the attempt, metaphorically "pulled out of the sack" and pushed back into her life. Yet she is never the same; she has been "stuck ... together with glue," implying a newfound sense of fragility and brokenness upon having failed to reunite with her father.

The speaker then decides rather than trying to reach her father through death, she will bring him back to life in the form of a husband. The speaker thus makes "a model" of her father and marries him. This husband, however, turns out to be just as unhealthy for her as her fixation on the memory of her father's death. She claims that her husband is a vampire who drank her blood—her life force—for seven years. This image attests to the unhealthiness of the marriage, which drains the speaker of life in much the same way her father's memory does.

It is clear that, in order to rid herself of the traumatic hold her father's death has on her, the speaker must entirely close the door on this chapter of her life. She does this through ending her marriage to her husband, an act which she likens to killing a man. The speaker claims, "If I've killed one man, I've killed two—", referring to the power both her husband and her father's memory had over her.

By metaphorically bringing her father back to life through marriage, the speaker is able to exercise control over a set of

events which initially left her feeling scared and helpless. Her marriage acts as a re-enactment of her relationship with her father, except this time she is an adult and is given the time she needs to see the relationship clearly. When the speaker chooses to end her marriage, she does so knowing that it will destroy her father's memory as well, an act which allows her to finally break free of her unhealthy fixation with death and move on with her life.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-7
- Lines 8-13
- Lines 14-15
- Line 29
- Lines 41-67
- Lines 68-70
- Line 71
- Lines 75-80

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-5

You do not ...
... breathe or Achoo.

The poem seems to begin with the speaker talking to a shoe, and telling it that it doesn't "do," or work for her, anymore (the repetition of "do" here is technically an example of a poetic device called antanaclasis). The speaker then declares that she has been stuck inside said shoe for her entire life, without fortune or access to the colorful outside world, scared of making the slightest sound.

Of course, the speaker isn't actually talking about a shoe. The poem's title is "Daddy," and the "You" the speaker addresses in the first line—via apostrophe—is really her father. The "black shoe" is likely a metaphor for her father's memory, which has a terrible hold on the speaker. The oppression the speaker feels—her poverty, her fear, her inability to breathe—are directly attributed to her father. The speaker is aware of this, and the poem begins with her renouncing her father's memory: "You do not do, you do not do / Any more, black shoe."

The first stanza of "Daddy" has a sing-song rhythm created by the repetition (more specifically, the epizeuxis) of "You do not do" in the first line and the strong assonance of /oo/ sounds, particularly at the ends of lines. In fact, it is not only *reminiscent* of a child's nursery rhyme; the image of the speaker living like a foot in a shoe is a *reference* (a.k.a. an allusion) to the famous nursery rhyme that begins: "There was an old woman who lived in a shoe." Together with the title, the fact that the first stanza evokes a nursery rhyme immediately infantilizes the speaker. Despite being thirty years old, she refers to her father as "Daddy" and to a sneeze as an "Achoo."

Moreover, it's clear from her description of the "black shoe" in which she is trapped like a foot—"Barely able to breathe—that her situation in life is oppressive. The image of the foot is telling. If the body is a hierarchy, then the head is in control: it exists at the top, and makes decisions for the entire body. It follows that the foot is at the bottom, bearing the weight of the entire body.

The shoe itself is also an oppressive image. Inside the shoe it is dark and there is no air. It's not hard to understand why the speaker would want to free herself from such an existence.

LINES 6-10

Daddy, I have ...
... a Frisco seal

The speaker continues to address her father directly in the second stanza, this time claiming that she has had to "kill" him. It is clear she doesn't mean that she has *literally* had to kill him, because in the following line she admits that he is *already* dead. The em dash punctuating "You died before I had time—" leads the speaker to the consequences of the fact that she wasn't able to metaphorically kill her father before he died. What the speaker likely means by "kill" here is that she wasn't able to kill the lofty *image/idea* of her father—to see him clearly, for who he really was—before he passed away.

And so, because he died before she had time to "kill" him, his memory has become "Marble-heavy, a bag full of God." The image is one of the speaker trying to live with her father's memory. She reveres her father; she sees him as godlike, impossible to carry.

She also compares him to a "Ghastly statue with one gray toe," an image which speaks not only to his immensity, to the monument she's made of him, but also to the fact that, to her, he is emblematic to her of death itself. The "Ghastly statue" suggests a corpse-like image, while the "one gray toe / Big as a Frisco seal" speaks to the way memory enlarges and magnifies details, particularly traumatic ones. The speaker is haunted by her father's death.

Plath's father, Otto Plath, died as a result of diabetes complications. He had specifically developed gangrene of the foot, and died shortly having having his leg subsequently amputated. The "Frisco seal" image is an allusion to this, comparing Otto Plath's toe to a seal (the marine mammal) off the coast of San Francisco—big, swollen, and gray.

LINES 11-15

And a head ...
... Ach, du.

The speaker continues to describe the monument she's made of her father—the statue that seems to stretch from coast to coast, all the way from San Francisco (alluded to with the

nickname "Frisco" in the last stanza) to the "freakish" Atlantic ocean on the other side of the country.

The enjambment between lines 9-13 reflects the immensity of the statue (and, by implication, of the speaker's father's memory/presence); the lines stretch across the page, and indeed across a stanza break, much as this colossal statue stretches across the country:

> ... one gray toe
> Big as a Frisco seal
> And a head in the freakish Atlantic
> Where it pours bean green over blue
> In the waters ...

"Freakish" perhaps describes the ocean less than it describes the speaker's sense of her father's presence, a presence so powerful and omnipresent that it feels almost supernatural to the speaker. And while her father's memory has become oppressive to the speaker by the start of the poem, her initial impulse to bring him back seems to have come from a place of sincere longing.

To that end, lines 12-14 are some of the most straightforward in the poem, describing the blue-green waters off the coast of Nauset, a lovely beachside town in Massachusetts. The language here is simple and poignant. When her father died, the speaker wished with a child's innocence that he would come back. The strong assonance here—particularly of the /aw/, /ee/, and /oo/ sounds—plus the consonance of the /b/ and /n/ sounds adds further beauty and rhythm to the lines:

> Where it pours bean green over blue
> In the waters off beautiful Nauset.
> I used to pray to recover you.

That simple sentiment, however, is complicated by the following expression, "Ach, du." The phrase is German for "Oh, you." The phrase itself is an endearing one, and reveals the genuine affection the speaker once had for her father. But the fact that she speaks it in *German* is a subtle moment of foreshadowing, as the poem soon goes on to associate the German language with the speaker's oppression. Also worth noting is the fact that Plath's real-life father Otto, on whom the poem is based, was indeed born in Germany.

LINES 16-21

> *In the German ...*
> *... dozen or two.*

After the speaker addresses her father in German, the poem moves on to a syntactically slippery moment, as the first three lines of the next stanza form an incomplete thought:

> In the German tongue, in the Polish town
> Scraped flat by the roller
> Of wars, wars, wars.

This isn't a full sentence; the two prepositional clauses ("In the German tongue," "in the Polish town") don't precede or follow a verb. "Scrape" is a verb, but in its past-tense usage it is just a part of the *description* of the town. The sentence fragment doesn't clearly connect to what came before it—the speaker doesn't elaborate on *what* is "In the German tongue, in the Polish town." She only describes the town, going on to say that its name is a common one; there are "a dozen or two" towns with the same name.

The speaker is perhaps imagining the father in this Polish town during World War II, with imagining him alive being one way of "recovering" him (as she said she used to "pray" to do in the previous stanza). If so, this image of her father might inform the speaker's statement about her friend.

The speaker uses a derogatory ethnic term ("Polack") to describe her friend—is this *her* passing judgment? Or is it her father's judgment, relayed by her? It's not clear, but it does begin to build the tension the speaker feels around "the German tongue."

On a separate note, the epizeuxis of "wars, wars, wars" suggests the endless nature of war, which flattens civilizations. The fact that the "Polish town" in which this happened is "common" further suggests that such wartime destruction is something that has happened often in human history. Perhaps this speaks to the way the speaker's own world was seemingly flatted out after the death of her father, and/or to the way his influence (and, by extension, the patriarchy itself) is a violent, war-like presence that "Scrape[s]" towns "flat."

LINES 22-27

> *So I never ...*
> *... ich, ich, ich,*

The previous stanza becomes a little clearer as the speaker explains the anxiety behind this vague description of an unnamed town: "So I never could tell where you / Put your foot, your root." The speaker is trying to locate some kind of physical record or proof of her father's involvement in World War II—where he went, where he was from.

Her inability to locate her father is reflected in the elusive syntax of the earlier stanza, and is more explicit here. Where there is a foot, there is a body. Where there is a root, there is something grounded in the physical world. The speaker is haunted by her father precisely *because* she can't locate him.

She then recalls never being able to speak to her father, saying, "The tongue stuck in my jaw. / It stuck in a barb wire snare." The speaker makes a leap here from an image of a tongue being stuck in a jaw to the metaphor of a tongue being stuck in a barb wire snare. This wire is used to keep livestock contained, and in

World War II it was used in concentration camps to keep Jewish people, and other racially "impure" groups, contained.

In the movement from the image of the tongue being stuck in the jaw to the metaphor of the tongue being stuck in a barb wire snare, the speaker reveals a deep fear of her father. This fear is so intense that she associates trying to talk to him with being contained in a concentration camp, as if expressing herself would put her in grave physical danger.

The end-stopping of these lines further reflects the speaker's inability to communicate. The subject of both lines 25 and 26 is the "tongue," yet these lines are separated by a full stop *and* a stanza break, creating a sense of self-containment, of impassibility, in the poem's form itself, perhaps again reflective of the strength of the speaker's fear:

> The tongue stuck in my jaw.
> It stuck in a barb wire snare.

This fear becomes even more visceral as the speaker attempts to speak to her father in his language in the following line: "Ich, ich, ich, ich"—the speaker stutters the German word for "I." This line speaks not only to her inability to express herself to her father, but to the difficulty of even *having* a self in her father's language. The repetition (technically more epizeuxis) of "Ich" is both a stutter as well as evidence of her insistence, of her attempt to locate herself in relation to her father.

LINES 28-33

I could hardly ...
... Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.

The speaker continues describing her fear of her father and her inability to communicate with him, claiming:

> I could hardly speak.
> I thought every German was you.

This anxiety again points to the way the speaker feels her father's presence everywhere. It implies a sort of vigilance—the speaker can't let her guard down, as she never knows how and when her father will appear to her.

She then describes the German language as "obscene / an engine, an engine / Chuffing me off like a Jew. / A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen." The poem continues to utilize Holocaust imagery here, alluding to specific concentration camps used during World War II. The speaker is drawing a direct parallel between her fear of her father and the Jewish fear of Nazis during World War II. Like the Jews, the speaker fears that one wrong word will be the end of her; to speak is dangerous.

The poem continues to utilize the formal elements it established in the first stanza, reminding the reader of the power dynamic between the speaker and her father. The repetition of "an engine" and the use of end-rhyme ("you" and "Jew," "engine" and "Belsen"—or even just assonance--"speak" and "obscene") still creates a sing-song effect. The use of onomatopoeia with the word "Chuffing" lends a childlike tone to the gruesome image of Jews being delivered to concentration camps, while the lack of conjunctions (asyndeton) between the names of the camps makes the list feel rapid and never-ending, like it could go on and on. These formal elements point to the speaker's sense of powerlessness in relation to her father.

LINES 34-39

I began to ...
... my Taroc pack

The metaphor established in the previous stanzas continues as the speaker identifies more and more as the victim in an oppressive relationship with the memory of her father. She moves from comparing herself to a Jew ("I began to talk like a Jew") to identifying *as* a Jew ("I think I may well be a Jew"). It is important to note that the speaker's identification isn't literal—what she is really identifying in herself is her own oppression.

In the previous stanza, the speaker had compared herself to "a Jew" on a train to a concentration camp. That imagery continues here, with the sensation that the speaker is passing by and noticing various European landmarks while on that train. The "Tyrol" refers to a region in the Alps (hence the reference to "snow," which would be atop the mountains there), while Vienna is the capital of Austria (not incidentally, Plath's own mother was of Austrian descent; in a way, the speaker is traveling through her own history). The reference to the beer being "clear" suggests that it, like white snow, is something fresh and pure.

And yet, in the next line, these are neither "pure" nor "true." Perhaps the speaker is saying that such appearances are only an *illusion* (perhaps much like patriarchal power itself). Given that Plath herself had Austrian ancestry, as noted above, this might be her rejecting the supposed racial purity of her own background.

Indeed, when the speaker then goes on to describe her own ancestry, she mentions her "gypsy ancestress." The word "gipsy" is a slur for the Romani people, another ethnic group that was heavily persecuted under the Nazi regime. Like Jews, the Romani were considered impure by the Nazis, and were therefore subject to elimination. This is the speaker's second time using an ethnic slur, but this time around it becomes apparent that she identifies more with the group being derided than she does with the "pure" group represented by her father.

The speaker's supposed lack of purity is further implied by this stanza's references to the occult—something often associated with women and female persecution (think of the Salem

witchcraft trials). The speaker describes herself as having "weird luck," for instance, with the word "weird" indicating a supernatural element. Readers will also notice the phrase "my Taroc pack," which is repeated in quick succession (more epizeuxis), almost like a kind of spell or incantation. A "Taroc pack" refers to an old European card game and also evokes the idea of "tarot" cards, which are used to predict the future.

Finally, line 36 ("The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna") is the longest in the poem, consisting of 13 syllables. It is worth noting that 13 is a significant number in most cultures, and is often superstitiously associated with luck (good or bad, depending on culture).

Perhaps, through all these allusions to strange and supernatural things, the speaker is subtly aligning herself with/reclaiming the legacy of powerful, subversive woman—the kind of women who have long been marginalized and oppressed in patriarchal society, yet who make up the speaker's "ancestress"-try.

LINES 40-45

I may be ...
... panzer-man, O You—

The speaker reiterates her identification with the role of the oppressed, describing herself as maybe being "a bit of a Jew." She then admits straightforwardly that she has always been afraid of her father. The italicization of "you" in line 41 ("I have always been scared of *you*") feels like a moment where the speaker finally begins to puncture the image she has of her father. The italics suggest that the speaker is seeing through all the mythology surrounding her father—a mythology she goes on to describe in the following lines—to what is really there at its center.

The speaker then lists off the things that have made her father terrifying. She associates him with the German air force (the "Luftwaffe"), and also with "gobbledygoo." This misspelling of the word *gobbledygook* might refer to her inability to understand her father. It is also evocative of the gibberish parents speak to babies, again emphasizing the way his authority infantilizes her, robs her of power and autonomy.

She goes on to describe her father's mustache as "neat," meaning clean and tidy, and his "Aryan eye, bright blue." This again alludes the Nazis and WWII, as Adolph Hitler believed those of pure Aryan descent—characterized by an ideal combination white skin, blond hair, and blue eyes—to be a superior race of people. The speaker is thus again linking her father to oppressive Nazi ideology. The image of a singular, blue eye is also metaphorical—the speaker feels watched by an authoritarian presence. "Panzer-man," meanwhile, refers to a soldier driving German armored tanks ("panzers") during the war.

Finally, the speaker erupts into a kind of impassioned accusation. The repetition of the word "Panzer-man" (which is specifically epizeuxis) has a dramatic effect. The speaker then arrives again at an expression—"Oh, you"—seen earlier in the poem, only this time it's in English. This is significant; the speaker will not be silenced by her father's oppressive language (i.e., German). Instead she cries out in her own language, and the em dash almost feels like a finger pointing directly at her father, whom she is seeing clearly for the first time in her life.

LINES 46-50

Not God but ...
... brute like you.

The speaker's accusation is this: her father isn't god after all. He has no real power. His power is akin to that of a swastika—the symbol for the Nazi regime. It struck fear into the hearts of those it sought to oppress, but its power was dependent on people believing in it. In order for a symbol to work, it has to be solid—"So black no sky could squeak through." The second the speaker pokes a hole in her father's mythology, it begins to crumble, and he no longer has no real authority over her.

Of course, the image of the speaker's father as a swastika also emphasizes the *violence* his hold has had over her all these years. The swastika stood for Nazi dominance, for the superiority of the Aryan race over other races, for German nationalist pride. The speaker also makes the (almost certainly ironic) claim that "Every woman adores a Fascist, / The boot in the face, the brute / Brute heart of a brute like you."

Fascism is a political ideology characterized by authoritarian power and the suppression, often violent, of any dissent. The poem thus makes an explicit connection here between the oppression of ethnic minorities by the Nazis and the oppression of women by men. At this point, the speaker's father becomes representative of patriarchal power more broadly.

A "brute" refers to someone who is violent and cruel, like a beast or monster; used as an adjective (as in "Brute heart" here) it means that something is savage, cruel, and barbaric. The "brute / Brute heart of a brute like you" refers to the speaker's father, but also to the heart of a patriarchal society in general, which is characterized by male dominance. The use of diacope seen in the repetition of the word "Brute" serves to both emphasize the speaker's rage and frustration and also to illustrate how pervasive this violence against women is in a male-dominated society.

LINES 51-56

You stand at ...
... heart in two.

Now that the speaker sees her father for who he really is, she recalls a photograph she has of him where he is standing at a blackboard, presumedly as a teacher (Plath's actual father was indeed a professor). The blackboard again indicates the authority of the speaker's father, but the speaker no longer

buys into this image. Instead, she understands that appearances can be deceiving.

This is reflected in the speaker's observation that while her father has a cleft (essentially, a dimple or fold) in his chin rather than a cleft in his foot, but he is "no less a devil for that." The allusion here is based on the common image of the devil as having cloven hooves (like those of a goat). The speaker is saying that even though her father does not have the cleft foot associated with the devil, that does not mean he is not evil/a bad person.

Indeed, the speaker is beginning to understand that the handsome man in the picture is essentially the same as the "black man" (another allusion to the devil) "who / Bit my pretty red heart in two." This description describes both the speaker's father (remember, in the last stanza she described him as a swastika, "So black no sky could squeak through"), but it also foreshadows the husband/vampire who is to appear later in the poem.

The image of the cloven-hoofed devil is also a continuation of the poem's recurring interest in feet. The speaker's metaphorical identification as a foot in the first stanza of the poem; the statue's gray toe; the speaker not being able to tell where her father puts his foot—these images of feet all serve different purposes in the poem, but together they add up to a fixation on the part of the speaker. They are also an allusion to Plath's own deceased father, who had to have his foot amputated shortly before he died of untreated diabetes.

LINES 57-62

I was ten ...
... together with glue.

Late in the poem, the speaker decides to go back to the beginning: she was 10 years old when her father died. When she was 20 years old, she tried to commit suicide ("tried to die") so that she could be reunited with him. Of course it was not a literal reunion the speaker sought in trying to kill herself; it was instead a reflection of how fixated she had become on her father's death. The use of epizeuxis in the phrase "back, back, back" illustrates the impossible distance between her and her father, literally lengthening that distance on the page.

The speaker's suicide attempt proved to be unsuccessful. An unnamed "they" found her and helped her recover. The way the speaker describes her rescue and recovery is telling though: "But they pulled me out of the sack, / And they stuck me together with glue." Her attitude seems to be one of irritation, not gratitude.

This makes sense if one views the speaker's attempt to die as an attempt at autonomy. Rather than living in a state of oppression, the speaker had wanted to destroy herself—yet even this one act proved to be beyond her power. The choice of words in the metaphor "they stuck me together with glue" illustrates the speaker's feelings of powerlessness. She feels like an object that is being repaired for the sake of other people's desires, her own desire denied in the process.

LINES 63-68

And then I ...
... I'm finally through.

Finally, the speaker reaches some sort of insight into her situation, claiming: "And then I knew what to do." She makes "a model" of her father, a man who resembles him with "A Meinkampf look" and "a love of the rack and the screw." The alliterative /m/ sounds here ("made a model," "man in black," "Meinkampf look") add emphasis to the phrase.

This in part speaks to the way violence against women is passed down from generation to generation. Children repeat their parents. They look to them for examples of how they too should behave. The speaker treats her father as a role model and marries a man who perpetuates the same violences against her. The repetition (epizeuxis) of her vows—"I do, I do"—illustrate not only the speaker's eagerness to repeat this pattern, but the fact that she is essentially saying yes to two men: her husband and her father.

The phrase "And a love of the rack and the screw" is a double entendre, as it has a more obvious meaning as well as a second, more sexually charged interpretation. On the one hand, a rack is a device used for torture which dates back to antiquity. It is an especially slow form of torture. The word screw also historically refers to any form of torture which involves the action of a screw. This interpretation of "the rack and the screw" underlines the husband's violent nature. This is reinforced by the fact that he has "a Meinkampf look," an allusion to Adolf Hitler's memoir and manifesto. In other words, he looks like a Nazi, a fascist.

On the other hand, the word rack is also a vulgar term for breasts, and the word screw a slang word for sex. Furthermore, the word screw can also mean to cheat someone. This secondary interpretation is an allusion to Plath's own husband, the poet Ted Hughes, from whom she separated shortly before this poem was written—a separation initiated by the fact that he was cheating on her with another woman.

Additionally, intentionally or not, the poem's use of the word screw calls to mind *The Turn of the Screw*, a famous gothic novella by Henry James about a governess who slowly becomes convinced that the estate where she is staying is haunted. This again echoes the speaker's sense of being haunted by her father's presence.

LINES 69-74

The black telephone's ...
... want to know.

After pronouncing that she's "through," the speaker explains

that the "black telephone's off at the root, / The voices just can't worm through." This is the speaker saying, metaphorically, that she is no longer interested in the relationship she has with her father.

The telephone is a symbol for communication: the speaker has long been unable to reach her father, and she no longer wants to do so. The description of the telephone as "black" signals the speaker's recognition that her desire to reach her father is a destructive urge. In this poem, black is used to signify oppressiveness—the "man in black with a Meinkampf look," the swastika "So black no sky could squeak through," and the "black shoe" from the beginning of the poem all use the color black in this way.

The speaker goes on to make the statement that "If [she's] killed one man, [she's] killed two—". This statement introduces some ambiguity into the poem because of the use of the conditional "If." In other words, she's *either* killed two men *or* none at all. The statement *implies* that she's killed two men, but it doesn't state it definitively.

The statement also implies that the killing of the two men was a singular act—that the killing of one man was *dependent* on the killing of the other. All of this points to the fact that the speaker is describing a metaphorical murder: by recognizing that her marriage to her husband is just a continuation of her relationship with her father, the speaker is able to see it for what it is. Her relationship to her father and her relationship to her husband are both symptomatic of a patriarchal society which does not value women. The speaker's marriage has drained her of life for seven years (hence the figurative comparison of her husband to a blood-sucking vampire). In ending it, she effectively ends her relationship with her father's memory as well.

LINES 75-80

Daddy, you can ...
... bastard, I'm through.

The speaker tells her father he "can lie back now," indicating that she is putting his memory to rest. She no longer wants to recover him; she wants him to remain dead, buried, no longer exercising power over her. She informs him that she has punctured the image she has carried of him her entire life, saying "There's a stake in your fat black heart." This time the word "black" describes his heart, his very core—she has pierced the truth at the center of him which has eluded her and haunted her all these years.

This builds off the vampire imagery from the previous stanza; in traditional folklore, vampires can be killed by a wooden stake through the heart. The speaker is also once again combining her father and husband here (she'd initially referred to her *husband* as this metaphorical vampire, but really this husband was just a "model" of the speaker's father, who in turn represents patriarchal society in general, and the way it drains women's life force).

In her final vision of her father, the oppressor is trampled by those who were previously oppressed. No longer is he in the position of putting "the boot in the face"—he himself is subject to the "stamping" of feet on his body. The speaker claims that the villagers "always *knew*" that he was responsible for their suffering. That italicization of the word *knew* again pointing to a moment in the poem where the mythology surrounding her father's authority is seen through. The villagers weren't fooled by appearances. And inside the speaker, too, is some part that has always known her father to be her oppressor. The speaker repeats the word "Daddy" twice (epizeuxis), giving a dramatic momentum to her final statement—a reiteration that she is through with him.

SYMBOLS

BLACKNESS

Plath uses the color black in this poem to symbolize the nature of oppression—the way it prohibits truth, warmth, and hope. In the first stanza the speaker identifies her father's memory as a "black shoe" in which she has lived her entire life. It is clear the speaker experiences this "black shoe" as oppressive because inside of it she is barely able to breathe or sneeze. While on the surface her description of herself as "poor and white" seems to speak to her economic and racial demographic, the word *white* equally describes the foot to which she is comparing herself. In other words, she is pale from being stuck inside a shoe; she has been kept inside it, away from the warmth and light of the sun.

This use of the color black is echoed in the tenth stanza, when the speaker describes her father as "Not God but a swastika / So black no sky could squeak through." Again, the significance of the color black is that it doesn't allow anything else to pass through it—in this case the sky, which could represent air (thus the speaker feeling like she cannot breathe), or sunlight (thus the speaker being "white"). The swastika is oppressive *because* it cannot be seen through; it too opaque for light to pass through. This is representative of the way the speaker cannot see her father through the image she has of him.

Once Plath has established the symbolic significance of the color black, she begins to use it more liberally. The speaker goes on to describe a "black man" who bit her heart in half, a "man in black" who has the look of a Nazi, and a "black telephone" which is no longer working. In each of these instances, the word *black* has become a kind of shorthand for oppressiveness—referring to the man hurt her, the husband loved to torment her, the telephone allowed the voices to "worm through." Only when that phone is "off at the root" is the speaker able to be free of the voices, and free of the oppressiveness they represent, the

oppressiveness of her father's power over her.

Finally, the speaker claims that there is a stake through her father's "fat black heart." She is able to free herself of his hold by piercing the oppressiveness at the core of him.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "black shoe"
- **Lines 46-47:** "Not God but a swastika / So black no sky could squeak through."
- **Lines 54-56:** "no not / Any less the black man who / Bit my pretty red heart in two."
- **Line 65:** "A man in black with a Meinkampf look"
- **Line 69:** "The black telephone's off at the root"

HOLOCAUST IMAGERY

Plath uses imagery related to the Holocaust and Naziism throughout the poem to symbolize illusory ideas of purity and the pain and terror of oppression. This begins with references to the German language (take the "Ach, du," or "Oh, you" of line 15), which connects the speaker's father directly to Germany—the aggressor in World War II. Plath's real-life father was German, and not coincidentally the speaker links her oppressor to Germany throughout the poem; she even says "I thought every German was you."

Her inability to speak German thus reflects her failure to communicate with her father, i.e., her oppressor. The specific image of her tongue being caught "in a barb wire snare" evokes the barbed wire fences used to enclose concentration camps, placing the speaker in the position of a Jewish person during the Holocaust. This comparison is made explicit when the speaker describes being shipped off "like a Jew" on a train "to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen." These are the names of real concentration camps during the war, in which millions of Jews were murdered.

The speaker is not literally saying she is Jewish; instead, she is—quite controversially—identifying with the plight of Jewish people during the Holocaust to contextualize her own suffering at the hands of an oppressive, male-dominated society. To that end, she also mentions her "gypsy ancestress"—the word "gypsy" is now considered a slur for the Romani people, an ethnic group that was also targeted by the Nazis. The fact that the speaker says "ancestress" here specifically describes a *female* ancestor, underscoring the idea that the speaker is oppressed because she is a woman.

Of course, the speaker does not just say her father is German; she depicts him as a *Nazi*—a man with an "Aryan eye" and a "neat mustache," an allusion to the infamous facial hairstyle of Adolph Hitler. Hitler and the Nazis were Fascists, meaning they believed in extreme authoritarianism, dictatorial power, and the—very often violent—suppression of any dissent. The speaker thus associates these qualities with her father, and with male-dominated society in general. Her husband, too, is presented as a Nazi, a man "with a Meinkampf look"; *Mein Kampf* was Hitler's manifesto.

Furthermore, Naziism is inextricable from dogma about Aryan supremacy, as the Nazis believed themselves to be racially "pure." All this imagery thus also serves the speaker's exploration of how ideas about *purity* tie into her oppression as a woman.

Plath wrote a great deal about the double standard for men and women, wherein men were allowed to do whatever they wanted and women were expected to be "pure," especially but not only in terms of their sexuality. Likewise, in this poem, the speaker describes the places associated with her ancestry as "not very pure or true." In other words, the speaker is subject to oppression because she is not "pure" enough.

Yet the speaker also presents such purity as an illusion. When the speaker makes the ironic claim that "Every woman adores a Fascist," she is underlining the *illusion* that women are buying into when they accept male authority, those systems and stories that venerate masculinity and punish women. And when the speaker says her father was "Not God but a swastika," she is saying that her father was *not* in fact all-powerful but rather an empty and perverted symbol; the "swastika" was originally an ancient Hindu symbol commandeered by the Nazi party, the power of which depended on blocking out any dissent whatsoever—on being "So black no sky could squeak through."

The use of the word "swastika" thus represents an important moment in the poem, as the speaker replaces her earlier perception of her father as godlike with an understanding that her father's authority is powerless without her belief in him. And it is not just her *father's* authority, but male dominance in general that proves to be built on a lie.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 15:** "Ach, du."
- **Lines 16-21:** "In the German tongue, in the Polish town / Scraped flat by the roller / Of wars, wars, wars. / But the name of the town is common. / My Polack friend / Says there are a dozen or two."
- **Lines 26-35:** "It stuck in a barb wire snare. / Ich, ich, ich, ich, / I could hardly speak. / I thought every German was you. / And the language obscene / An engine, an engine / Chuffing me off like a Jew. / A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen. / I began to talk like a Jew. / I think I may well be a Jew."
- **Lines 36-45:** "The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna / Are not very pure or true. / With my gipsy ancestress and my weird luck / And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack / I may be a bit of a Jew. / I have always been scared of / you, / With your Luftwaffe, your

gobbledygoo. / And your neat mustache / And your Aryan eye, bright blue. / Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You—"

- **Lines 46-47:** "Not God but a swastika / So black no sky could squeak through."
- **Line 48:** "Every woman adores a Fascist,"
- **Line 65:** "A man in black with a Meinkampf look"

THE TELEPHONE

The telephone here is a symbol of communication. Communication has been a source of anxiety and struggle for the speaker, who cannot speak to her father or express herself in his language, a language she finds oppressive. Her attempts at communication leave her stuttering and even put her in danger. Therefore, the telephone being "off at the root" signals that the speaker no longer desires to communicate with her father.

The telephone may also been seen to symbolize the speaker's relationship to her dead father, which is characterized by distance and an inability to actually see him or locate his physical presence in the world. Despite being a product of the material world, the telephone gestures toward the disembodiment of the speaker's father—in other words, he lacks physical form.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 69-70:** "The black telephone's off at the root, / The voices just can't worm through."

THE VAMPIRE

Vampires are supernatural creatures which, according to folklore from various cultures throughout history, feed on the blood or essence of living beings. Here and elsewhere the vampire is used to symbolize predatory behavior.

Specifically, the vampire here is a reference to the speaker's husband, who metaphorically feeds on the speaker—draining her life force—for "years." This implies the imbalanced power dynamic of their relationship, in which the speaker gives and her husband takes. In the broader context of the poem, such a vampiric relationship may symbolize the status of women within a patriarchal society; women create life, which is then sucked from them by male-dominated power structures.

In contemporary depictions, vampires look and act like people so that human beings may not know the vampire's true motives until it is too late. Because the vampire is undead (that is, a dead person brought back to life through supernatural means, and therefore neither really living nor really dead), the vampire is essentially a fraud. It must pretend to be something it is not—"The vampire who said he was you"—in order to trick people into letting it into their homes.

This, in turn, may reflect the poem's idea that patriarchal power is an *illusion*, something enforced through trickery and deceit. Just as the speaker eventually understands her father to be "Not God but a swastika—that is, not some divine being but rather an empty symbol built around bunk ideas of racial purity—the vampire is able to survive based on false ideas about the superiority of men and the expectation that women provide for them.

Additionally, scholars have attributed historical beliefs regarding vampires to the fact that early humans didn't fully understand death and the body's subsequent decomposition. In response, they may have created the idea of the vampire to try to make sense of death and decay. In this way, the vampire is perhaps further symbolic of the mysteriousness of death.

This is especially true in the context of this poem, where the speaker lost her father when she was a child. She was therefore particularly ignorant of death's processes, as evidenced by the lingering image of her father as a "Ghastly statue with one gray toe." The symbol of the vampire helps build the magnitude of how traumatizing the father's death was to the speaker, while also contributing to the overall idea that the speaker has been scared of her father's memory all these years.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 72-74:** "The vampire who said he was you / And drank my blood for a year, / Seven years, if you want to know."

DADDY

By the end of the poem, the figure of the father himself has come to symbolize more than the speaker's actual "daddy." He actually symbolizes a variety of things: death; unresolved, traumatic memory; patriarchal oppression; and more generally, any person or idea in which authority has been invested to the detriment of those who believe in it.

The speaker is addressing her father, but Plath was *also* addressing all of these huge, complicated ideas that she could only get to through the lens of the speaker's individual relationship with her father. Plath was thinking and writing a great deal about patriarchy and oppression and death and memory towards the end of her life; for her, "Daddy" was the perfect symbol to bring together these various, related concerns.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 6:** "Daddy, I have had to kill you."

- **Line 68:** "So daddy, I'm finally through."
- **Line 75:** "Daddy, you can lie back now."
- **Line 80:** "Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through."

FEET

Feet appear frequently in this poem, and are often symbolic in nature. Sometimes they symbolize power and hierarchy; other times they symbolize the absence of the father's physical body in the world, and the speaker's need for evidence or proof of some kind, something to legitimize her feelings of terror.

The poem starts with the speaker comparing herself to a foot that has lived inside of a black shoe. The image is an oppressive one and it is clear that the speaker has felt powerless, "barely daring to breathe or Achoo." In this case the foot is symbolic of being oppressed. Feet are the lowest part of the body; they bear the weight of the body. Think of the body as a hierarchy: the head is at the top, making all the decisions. The feet are at the bottom. They have no power.

Next, the speaker pictures her father as a "Ghastly statue with one gray toe." The toe is "Big as a Frisco seal," pointing to the enlarged significance this one physical aspect of her father has taken on in the speaker's memory. Likewise, death has enlarged the father for the speaker. She is haunted by him—he seems to exist everywhere. Yet this existence is complicated by the fact that she cannot physically locate him—not just because he is dead, but because she can't find evidence of where he is from, where he's been. This lack of evidence is reflected in the speaker's declaration to her father that she "never could tell where you / Put your foot, your root." The speaker is trying to make sense of her feelings toward her father, of why she is so scared of him, of why she could never talk to him. Seeing her father clearly would help her understand her fear, but he is difficult to see, elusive.

In the tenth stanza, the poem again utilizes feet, except this time it is the image of a Fascist's boot in the face of "every woman." This is an inversion of the initial image that opened the poem. Instead of *being* the foot, the speaker envisions being the *brunt* of the foot—the foot now being used as a weapon. At the same time, the image of "the boot in the face" is a continuation of that opening image because it implies that even the lowest part of a man is superior to a woman. The image makes it clear that this hierarchy is established through violence.

The speaker then remembers a photograph of her father. She cannot tell by looking at the photograph that he is a devil; there is no "cleft" in his foot (devils are often depicted as having cloven hooves). In other words, the photograph doesn't prove the speaker's feelings to be true. The speaker, however, now knows not to trust the picture; she understands now that things are not as they appear.

In the last stanza, the speaker has inverted the hierarchy between herself and her father. The oppressor is now the one being danced and stamped upon. The fact that the father is subject to the villagers' feet is symbolic of the fact that he no longer has any power over the speaker. This triumph is followed by the speaker's proclamation that the villagers "always *knew* it was you." This is where the two symbolic resonances of feet merge. The speaker gains power over her father's memory by trusting herself. She's always been terrified of her father but his power over her came from the fact that she didn't think she had any right to be terrified, that her feelings were false because she couldn't find the evidence for them. In fact her feelings were true all along, but she is only able to prove them true through acting on them.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-4:** "black shoe / In which I have lived like a foot / For thirty years"
- **Lines 9-10:** "Ghastly statue with one gray toe / Big as a Frisco seal"
- **Lines 22-23:** "So I never could tell where you / Put your foot"
- **Line 49:** "The boot in the face"
- **Lines 53-54:** "A cleft in your chin instead of your foot / But no less a devil for that"
- **Line 78:** "They are dancing and stamping on you."

POETIC DEVICES

APOSTROPHE

Between the title and the first two lines of the poem, "Daddy" immediately employs two different instances of apostrophe. The first instance is through the title itself, which is addressing the speaker's dead father—something she will continue to do throughout the poem. Her father, of course, cannot respond; the use of apostrophe thus highlights the continued role he plays in the speaker's life even after his death. She is still trying to talk to him, to tell him something—even if that something is that she wants nothing more to do with him.

In the second instance, the speaker begins the poem by speaking directly to her situation in life, which she personifies by addressing as a "You." She then goes on to metaphorically describe this "You" as a shoe in which she has lived for her entire life.

Because these two instances of apostrophe sit so close to each other, the reader is likely to conflate the father with the oppressive black shoe in which the speaker lives. In this way, it could be said that the speaker is actually addressing her father in both instances, but that he shows up in different ways: as "Daddy" in her *memory*, but also as an oppressive presence in

her *life*.

The speaker continues to address her father throughout the entire poem, intermittently calling him "Daddy." In the second stanza she declares that she has had to kill her father because he died before she got the chance, informing the reader that she is in fact addressing the memory of her father rather than her father himself.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "You do not do, you do not do / Any more, black shoe"
- **Lines 6-7:** "Daddy, I have had to kill you. / You died before I had time—"
- **Lines 14-15:** "I used to pray to recover you. / Ach, du."
- **Lines 22-24:** "So I never could tell where you / Put your foot, your root, / I never could talk to you."
- **Line 29:** "I thought every German was you."
- **Lines 41-45:** "I have always been scared of / you, / With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo. / And your neat mustache / And your Aryan eye, bright blue. / Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You—"
- **Lines 50-53:** "Brute heart of a brute like you. / You stand at the blackboard, daddy, / In the picture I have of you, / A cleft in your chin instead of your foot"
- **Line 57:** "I was ten when they buried you."
- **Line 59:** "And get back, back, back to you."
- **Line 64:** "I made a model of you,"
- **Line 68:** "So daddy, I'm finally through."
- **Line 72:** "The vampire who said he was you"
- **Lines 74-80:** "Seven years, if you want to know. / Daddy, you can lie back now. / There's a stake in your fat black heart / And the villagers never liked you. / They are dancing and stamping on you. / They always / knew / it was you. / Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through."

ASYNDETON

Plath uses asyndeton quite frequently in this poem. In general, asyndeton can ramp up the pace of a poem; with no need to stop for pesky conjunctions, the speak can move swiftly forward. As such, asyndeton here adds to the poem's general sense of propulsive momentum.

Asyndeton also affects the rhythm of a poem. This can be seen with the asyndeton in line 33 ("A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belson"). By omitting a conjunction ("and" or "or") between the words "Auschwitz" and "Belsen," Plath is able to achieve a different rhythm than she might have otherwise. The names fly by, as if the speaker were rushing past each location on a train.

The grammatical structure of the line also implies that these are just three of the *many* possible destinations—there were many more concentration camps than these three during the war, but the speaker isn't going to name them all. By using a conjunction ("A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, or Belson"), the speaker would have been limiting the reader to those destinations specifically, rather than gesturing to concentration camps more generally. It is, after all, the *idea* of the concentration camp—the containment, the imprisonment, the torture, the elimination—that she is getting at rather than those camps in particular.

Asyndeton creates this potential for an endless list in other spots in the poem as well. Take line 36:

> The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna
> Are not very pure or true.

As with the prior example, asyndeton here helps create the sense that this list could go on and on—that the speaker could mention many Austrian things alleged to be pure, ad then refute that purity.

Where Asyndeton appears in the poem:

- **Lines 8-9:** "Marble-heavy, a bag full of God, / Ghastly statue with one gray toe"
- **Line 16:** "In the German tongue, in the Polish town"
- **Line 18:** "wars, wars, wars."
- **Line 23:** "your foot, your root,"
- **Line 33:** "A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen."
- **Line 36:** "The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna"
- **Line 42:** "With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo."

SIMILE

Plath's use of simile in this poem can be a little difficult to pinpoint at times, as it often coincides with metaphor and/or imagery. For instance, in the first stanza, "black shoe / In which I have lived like a foot" is a simile; the speaker is comparing her *life* to a *foot* that has been stuck inside a shoe. Basically, she is saying that she feels constrained, stuck in a space with no light or air and the weight of a body pressing down. The simile is part of a larger metaphor about the constricted circumstances of her life and the hierarchical, oppressive relationship between her father and herself.

Similarly, in the second stanza, "one gray toe / Big as a Frisco seal" is a simile which is working *within* the structure of a larger metaphor. The simile is that the toe of the statue is as big as a seal from San Francisco—it's a direct comparison, meant to capture the hideousness of the disease that took the speaker's father from her. The larger metaphor within which this simile appears, however, is a little more complicated: the speaker has made a monument of her father's death. Not only is it heavy and terrifying, it is also vast, seemingly stretching from San Francisco to the Atlantic.

Later in the poem, Plath uses an extended metaphor that explores the speaker's relationship to her father in relation to

the relationship between Jewish people and Nazis during the Holocaust. In the middle of this extended metaphor are two similes ("Chuffing me off like a Jew" and "I began to talk like a Jew") which serve the metaphor. When the speaker says "I began to talk like a Jew," she is not speaking literally; after all, one can't identify someone as being Jewish by the way they talk. She is instead referring to an inability to communicate with her father, i.e., her oppressor.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-3:** "black shoe / In which I have lived like a foot"
- **Lines 9-10:** "one gray toe / Big as a Frisco seal"
- **Line 32:** "Chuffing me off like a Jew."
- **Line 34:** "I began to talk like a Jew."

METAPHOR

"Daddy" employs a great deal of metaphor. The speaker names her situation in life as that of a foot living inside of a cramped shoe. Then she imagines her father as a colossal statue, so monumental that it is essentially stretching from San Francisco to the Atlantic. He is also "Marble-heavy, a bag full of God"—two metaphorical phrases meant again to imply the weight of his memory over the speaker.

Later she addresses her father, saying "I never could tell where you / Put your foot, your root." This is a subtle metaphor which illustrates the speaker's uncertainty about where her father has been, where he's from, and what he might be hiding from her. It contributes to her sense of his being godlike because she feels him everywhere yet cannot locate his physical presence in the world.

The poem also employs two extended metaphors. The first extended metaphor begins with the speaker not being able to talk to her father ("The tongue stuck in my jaw. / It stuck in a barb wire snare.") and carries across several stanzas before culminating in the speaker's realization that her father is "Not God but a swastika / So black no sky could squeak through." The speaker has to go through the process of comparing her own sense of personal oppression with the oppression of Jewish people by Nazis during the Holocaust in order for her to arrive at the conclusion that her father is, in essence, a Nazi—an oppressor who belongs to a system of oppression, which means her suffering too has a context.

The poem also ends in an extended metaphor, one that compares both her husband and her father to vampires that have drained her of life. This metaphor allows the speaker to puncture her father's heart with a stake, a metaphor for the way the speaker has finally seen through the godlike image she has of her father.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-5
- Line 8
- Lines 9-11
- Lines 16-18
- Lines 22-23
- Lines 25-47
- Lines 54-56
- Lines 61-62
- Line 66
- Lines 69-70
- Lines 71-80

IMAGERY

There is a great deal of imagery in this poem, much of it overlapping with instances of simile or metaphor. Most of the imagery is either visual ("And your neat mustache") or tactile ("The tongue stuck in my jaw. / It stuck in a barb wire snare."), emphasizing the poem's themes of trying to *see through* the mythology surrounding power and what it *feels like* to be oppressed.

The imagery is also often misleading at first read—again emphasizing the necessity of seeing through the way things are depicted by those in power. For instance, the lines "An engine, an engine / Chuffing me off like a Jew" feel childlike at first—the nostalgia of steam engine trains, the word "Chuffing" almost playful because of the onomatopoeia. But then of course the image proves to be of awful, historical consequence; it is an image of Jewish people being transported to concentration camps.

Similarly, the following stanza begins with the speaker describing her own ancestry, beginning with "The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna." It's a pleasant image, made more pleasant because of the melodic sounds created by the assonance and internal rhymes of "snows" and "Tyrol," of "clear" and "beer." But the speaker goes on to say they "Are not very pure or true." In other words, despite these pleasant associations, the speaker's ancestry is apparently part of the problem—she's not "pure" or "true" enough to escape oppression. This fact throws into question the words "pure" and "true" themselves—what does it mean to be pure? What is true? The poem interrogating appearances every chance it gets.

Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-5:** " black shoe / In which I have lived like a foot / For thirty years, poor and white, / Barely daring to breathe or Achoo."
- **Lines 8-13:** "Marble-heavy, a bag full of God, / Ghastly statue with one gray toe / Big as a Frisco seal / And a head in the freakish Atlantic / Where it pours bean green over blue / In the waters off beautiful Nauset."

- **Lines 16-18:** "town / Scraped flat by the roller / Of wars, wars, wars."
- **Lines 25-26:** "The tongue stuck in my jaw. / It stuck in a barb wire snare."
- **Lines 31-32:** "An engine, an engine / Chuffing me off like a Jew."
- **Lines 36-37:** "The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna / Are not very pure or true."
- **Lines 43-44:** "And your neat mustache / And your Aryan eye, bright blue."
- **Lines 46-47:** "a swastika / So black no sky could squeak through."
- **Line 49:** "The boot in the face,"
- **Lines 51-53:** "You stand at the blackboard, daddy, / In the picture I have of you, / A cleft in your chin instead of your foot"
- **Line 56:** "Bit my pretty red heart in two."
- **Lines 61-62:** "But they pulled me out of the sack, / And they stuck me together with glue."
- **Line 65:** "A man in black with a Meinkampf look"
- **Lines 69-70:** "The black telephone's off at the root, / The voices just can't worm through."
- **Lines 72-73:** "The vampire who said he was you / And drank my blood for a year,"
- **Line 76:** "There's a stake in your fat black heart"
- **Line 78:** "They are dancing and stamping on you."

ALLUSION

"Daddy" contains many allusions, some of which are more obvious than others. The poem begins with a subtle allusion to a famous nursery rhyme—"There was an old woman who lived in a shoe." The allusion makes the nursery-rhyme structure of the poem feel even more intentional.

There are a good number of personal illusions within the poem as well. While the poem should not be read as strictly autobiographical, it is fair to say that it was influenced a great deal by real events in Plath's life. For instance, "one gray toe / Big as a Frisco seal" seems to be an allusion to the disease which killed Plath's real-life father, Otto Plath. Near the end of his life he had to have his foot amputated due to untreated diabetes, a condition which eventually killed him.

Otto Plath had been born in Germany, which informs the many references to the German language throughout the poem. Similarly, Plath's mother was of Austrian descent, which informs the poem's allusions to the Austrian Alps (with "the snows of Tyrol") and "the clear beer of Vienna," Austria's capital city.

Later in the poem, the speaker again refers to her father's death, and then to her own attempt to commit suicide, saying "At twenty I tried to die / And get back, back, back to you." This is an allusion to Plath's own suicide attempt at age 20, an attempt she survived when she was discovered under her mother's house. Additionally, the speaker describes her husband as having "a love of the rack and the screw," a phrase which seems to allude to Plath's own marriage to Ted Hughes, which disintegrated after she discovered he was cheating on her with a mutual friend. "The screw" may also be a subtle allusion to *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James, a novella about a governess who believes the grounds of the estate where she works to be haunted.

The poem also has several historical allusions. The speaker describes a "Polish town / Scraped flat by the roller / Of wars, wars, wars." Though "the name of the town is common," it isn't named outright in the poem. Similarly, the Holocaust and Nazism are both alluded to directly on many occasions (for example, "Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen" are the names of concentration camps; "a swastika" was the symbol of the Nazi party; "Meinkampf" refers to Adolph Hitler's manifesto). The allusions inform the poem and create a sense of the speaker piecing things together, trying to make sense of her relationship to her father, trying to see how her oppression fits into a larger context of oppressive systems.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-3:** "shoe / In which I have lived like a foot"
- **Lines 9-10:** "one gray toe / Big as a Frisco seal"
- **Lines 11-13:** "And a head in the freakish Atlantic / Where it pours bean green over blue / In the waters off beautiful Nauset."
- **Lines 16-19:** "the Polish town / Scraped flat by the roller / Of wars, wars, wars. / But the name of the town is common."
- **Lines 31-33:** "An engine, an engine / Chuffing me off like a Jew. / A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen."
- **Lines 36-39:** "The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna / Are not very pure or true. / With my gipsy ancestress and my weird luck / And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack"
- **Lines 41-46:** "I have always been scared of / you, / With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo. / And your neat mustache / And your Aryan eye, bright blue. / Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You— / Not God but a swastika"
- **Lines 57-59:** "I was ten when they buried you. / At twenty I tried to die / And get back, back, back to you."
- **Line 61:** "But they pulled me out of the sack,"
- **Line 65:** "Meinkampf"
- **Line 66:** "And a love of the rack and the screw."

ENJAMBMENT

About half of the lines in "Daddy" are enjambed. Yet even when lines are enjambed, they tend to end in a place where it would be natural to take a breath. In fact, if anything, the enjambment helps break up syntactically complex sentences into small, more

digestible chunks.

The back-and-forth between enjambed lines and end-stopped lines helps create the poem's tension. On the one hand, the poem is constrained by its relatively short lines and the abundance of end rhyme created by the assonance of /oo/ sounds. This gives the poem a level of rigidity, but the rigidity is somewhat tempered by the fluctuation in actual sentence/phrase length. So while the *lines* may be relatively short, the *sentences* stretching across those lines are sometimes short and sometimes long. The fact that they vary keeps the poem from becoming monotonous, or *too* sing-song-y.

So, for example, the lines in the first stanza are fairly regular in length (all of the lines fall between five and nine syllables long) and three of the five lines end in an /oo/ sound. This creates a strong sense of rhythm and rhyme, but it is balanced out by the fact that all of the lines except for the last two are enjambed. This keeps the reader moving along rather than lingering very long on those end rhymes.

Then, an end-stopped line completes the stanza ("Barely daring to breathe or Achoo."), and an end-stopped line begins the next stanza ("Daddy, I have had to kill you."). These two end-stopped lines break up the flow established in the first four lines of the poem, while also emphasizing the rhyme between them ("Achoo" and "you"). Then the poem again launches into a series of enjambed lines.

Sometimes the enjambment feels thematically significant as well, as in lines 9-13:

> Ghastly statue with one gray toe
> Big as a Frisco seal
> And a head in the freakish Atlantic
> Where it pours bean green over blue
> In the waters off beautiful Nauset.

The sentence spills down the page and across a stanza break here, reflecting the colossal size of this metaphorical statue, which seems to stretch across the entire country. Similarly, the enjambment in lines 16-18 perhaps evokes the flattening effect of these "wars, wars, wars," as each line itself "roll[s]" across the line break:

> ... in the Polish town
> Scraped flat by the roller
> Of wars, wars, wars.

Enjambment also allows for very intentional syntax, such as in lines 36-40 ("The snows of the Tyrol ... I may be a bit of a Jew."). In this stanza, each sentence unfolds across two to three lines at a time. This allows the poet some flexibility in arranging the words across lines. In this case, Plath presents an image relating to the speaker's ancestry *before* presenting the speaker's interpretation of the image. So the reader gets a chance to visualize "The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna" *before* the speaker announces that these markers of her ancestry "are not very pure or true."

The syntax thus helps distinguish the thing being interpreted (the snow-capped mountains of the Tyrol region in northern Italy, or the beer of Austria's capital city) from the interpretation of it ("not very pure or true"). Yet the fact that these lines are *enjambed* also makes them *inseparable*; the white "snows" and "clear beer" of Austria slip right into the speaker's assertion that these things are in fact not "pure or true."

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "do / Any"
- **Lines 2-3:** "shoe / In"
- **Lines 3-4:** "foot / For"
- **Lines 9-10:** "toe / Big"
- **Lines 10-11:** "seal / And"
- **Lines 11-12:** "Atlantic / Where"
- **Lines 12-13:** "blue / In"
- **Lines 16-17:** "town / Scraped"
- **Lines 17-18:** "roller / Of"
- **Lines 20-21:** "friend / Says"
- **Lines 22-23:** "you / Put"
- **Lines 30-31:** "obscene / An"
- **Lines 31-32:** "engine / Chuffing"
- **Lines 36-37:** "Vienna / Are"
- **Lines 38-39:** "luck / And"
- **Lines 39-40:** "pack / I"
- **Lines 43-44:** "mustache / And"
- **Lines 46-47:** "swastika / So"
- **Lines 49-50:** "brute / Brute"
- **Lines 53-54:** "foot / But"
- **Lines 54-55:** "not / Any"
- **Lines 55-56:** "who / Bit"
- **Lines 58-59:** "die / And"
- **Lines 65-66:** "look / And"
- **Lines 72-73:** "you / And"
- **Lines 76-77:** "heart / And"

END-STOPPED LINE

"Daddy" has nearly as many end-stopped lines as it does enjambed lines, but the end-stopped and enjambed lines are not interspersed regularly. In other words, sometimes there will be several enjambed lines in a row and then a single end-stopped line—or vice versa. Sometimes there are a few end-stopped lines in a row, or an entire stanza that is enjambed. The point is that Plath uses a variety of end-stopped and enjambed lines to keep the poem from becoming monotonous.

Inevitably, when there is a series of enjambed lines and then an end-stopped line, emphasis falls on the end-stopped line. The enjambed lines almost act like a build-up, preparing the reader for something to come. Lines 9-15 are a great example:

Ghastly statue ...
... Nauset.
I used to pray to recover you.
Ach, du.

The reader is pulled along with the use of enjambment, moving through images describing the colossal metaphorical statue, until the hard stop after "Nauset." Then the reader is brought into a single, emotional moment: "I used to pray to recover you." Compared to the dense imagery and metaphor and simile that came before, the line "I used to pray ..." feels incredible straight-forward and emotionally vulnerable. Even if the reader hasn't entirely made sense of everything up until this point, they have a clear sense of what the speaker is feeling in this moment.

This is then followed by line 15, "Ach, du." The shortest line in the poem, it is also end-stopped, giving the reader time to sit with the speaker's emotion before moving on to more imagery, similes, and metaphors.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "white,"
- **Line 5:** "Achoo."
- **Line 6:** "you."
- **Line 7:** "time—"
- **Line 8:** "God,"
- **Line 13:** "Nauset."
- **Line 14:** "you."
- **Line 15:** "du."
- **Line 18:** "wars."
- **Line 19:** "common."
- **Line 21:** "two."
- **Line 23:** "root,"
- **Line 24:** "you."
- **Line 25:** "jaw."
- **Line 26:** "snare."
- **Line 27:** "ich,"
- **Line 28:** "speak."
- **Line 29:** "you."
- **Line 32:** "Jew."
- **Line 33:** "Belsen."
- **Line 34:** "Jew."
- **Line 35:** "Jew."
- **Line 37:** "true."
- **Line 40:** "Jew."
- **Line 41:** "you,"
- **Line 42:** "gobbledygoo."
- **Line 44:** "blue."
- **Line 47:** "through."
- **Line 48:** "Fascist,"
- **Line 50:** "you."
- **Line 51:** "daddy,"
- **Line 52:** "you,"
- **Line 56:** "two."
- **Line 57:** "you."
- **Line 59:** "you."
- **Line 60:** "do."
- **Line 61:** "sack,"
- **Line 62:** "glue."
- **Line 63:** "do."
- **Line 64:** "you,"
- **Line 66:** "screw."
- **Line 67:** "do."
- **Line 68:** "through."
- **Line 69:** "root,"
- **Line 70:** "through."
- **Line 71:** "two—"
- **Line 73:** "year,"
- **Line 74:** "know."
- **Line 75:** "now."
- **Line 77:** "you."
- **Line 78:** "you."
- **Line 79:** "you."
- **Line 80:** "through."

CAESURA

In this poem, caesura works in much the same way that the variation of enjambed and end-stopped lines work. In other words, it helps to shape and break up the poem's rhythm. This is clear from the first stanza of the poem, where three of the five lines use caesura in roughly the same way—that is, to break the line into two smaller, roughly equal chunks. The other two lines do not use caesura, which keeps the stanza from falling into too predictable a pattern.

Caesura is also a side effect of certain kinds of repetition within lines. For instance, Plath uses epizeuxis quite frequently: lines like "Of wars, wars, wars" (18) or "Ich, ich, ich, ich," (27) repeat words multiple times to great effect. The occurrence of caesura within these lines means that the word is emphasized each time it is read or spoken. Had Plath chosen to repeat the words without the use of caesura (so "wars wars wars" instead of "wars, wars, wars") there would be a noticeably different resonance.

It's worth noting that while Plath varies *how much* caesura she uses in a line (sometimes there is a single comma, other times there are multiple, other times none), the caesura is only ever created through the use of *one kind* of punctuation: the comma. While many of the lines are enjambed, they are not so enjambed as to result in sentences which outright *end* in the middle of a line. Periods, and even em dashes, only occur at the *ends* of lines. Because of this, caesura in this poem always indicates a soft pause—a short breath—rather than the hard pause created by a period, or even the in-between pause of a colon or semi-colon. This contributes to the speed and urgency

of the poem.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "do, you"
- **Line 2:** "more, black"
- **Line 4:** "years, poor"
- **Line 6:** "Daddy, I"
- **Line 8:** "Marble-heavy, a"
- **Line 15:** "Ach, du"
- **Line 16:** "tongue, in"
- **Line 18:** "wars, wars, wars"
- **Line 23:** "foot, your"
- **Line 27:** "Ich, ich, ich, ich"
- **Line 31:** "engine, an"
- **Line 33:** "Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen"
- **Line 36:** "Tyrol, the"
- **Line 42:** "Luftwaffe, your"
- **Line 44:** "eye, bright"
- **Line 45:** "Panzer-man, panzer-man, O"
- **Line 49:** "face, the"
- **Line 51:** "blackboard, daddy"
- **Line 54:** "that, no"
- **Line 59:** "back, back, back"
- **Line 67:** "do, I"
- **Line 68:** "daddy, I'm"
- **Line 71:** "man, I've"
- **Line 74:** "years, if"
- **Line 75:** "Daddy, you"
- **Line 80:** "Daddy, daddy, you," "bastard, I'm"

REPETITION

To say that Plath uses a great deal of repetition in this poem would be an understatement. The poem utilizes a variety of specific kinds of repetition, many of which overlap. Many of these specific kinds of repetition are dealt with in greater length under their own entries in this guide. However, it is worth considering the *overall* effect of so many devices which all fall under the category of repetition.

One of the main thematic concerns of "Daddy" is the speaker's desire to break free from the power her father's death has over her. Her fixation on his death is compulsive, powerful, and harmful to her. In order to break free of it, she must first recognize the patterns which have led her to where she is at this point in her life. The poem reflects these patterns through the use of repetition.

These harmful patterns do not just belong to the speaker; the speaker is beginning to understand that they belong to a larger, historical context of oppression at the hands of authoritative power. In order to better understand her *own* situation, the speaker must recognize how she fits into a lineage of oppression, of "wars, wars, wars," of people who have been subject to "The boot in the face, the brute / Brute heart of a brute like you."

As the speaker repeats the trauma which was handed down to her (saying "I do, I do" to "A man in black with a Meinkampf look," for example), she becomes more and more aware of the pattern she is stuck in. Once she becomes aware of it and decides to be free of it, the use of repetition in the poem begins to shift from being compulsive to being *insistent*. In both the first and the last lines of the poem, which are both spoken in the present, the speaker is very intentionally repeating herself in an attempt to be heard. "You do not do, you do not do," and "Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through" both have the ring of someone putting their foot down.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "You do not do, you do not do"
- **Line 16:** "In the," "in the"
- **Line 18:** "wars, wars, wars."
- **Line 22:** "I never could"
- **Line 23:** "your," "your"
- **Line 24:** "I never could"
- **Line 25:** "stuck"
- **Line 26:** "stuck"
- **Line 27:** "Ich, ich, ich, ich,"
- **Line 31:** "An engine, an engine"
- **Line 32:** "a Jew."
- **Line 33:** "A Jew"
- **Line 34:** "a Jew."
- **Line 35:** "a Jew."
- **Line 39:** "And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack"
- **Line 40:** "a Jew."
- **Line 42:** "your," "your"
- **Line 43:** "And your"
- **Line 44:** "And your"
- **Line 45:** "Panzer-man, panzer-man,"
- **Line 49:** "brute"
- **Line 50:** "Brute," "brute"
- **Line 54:** "less"
- **Line 55:** "less"
- **Line 59:** "back, back, back"
- **Line 60:** "do."
- **Line 62:** "And"
- **Line 63:** "And," "do."
- **Line 66:** "And"
- **Line 67:** "And," "I do, I do."
- **Line 71:** "I've killed," "I've killed"
- **Line 73:** "year,"
- **Line 74:** "years"
- **Line 77:** "you."
- **Line 78:** "They," "you."
- **Line 79:** "They," "you."
- **Line 80:** "Daddy, daddy,"

ALLITERATION

Alliteration is just one of many repetitive devices used in this poem. It often appears alongside other forms of repetition, sometimes overlapping them. Often times alliteration in this poem is actually the *result* of another kind of repetition, such as in the first line of the poem: the repetition of the word "do" is what creates the alliteration. This happens in other places as well: the alliteration of the /w/ sound in line 18, created by the repetition of the word "wars," and the alliteration of the short /i/ sound in line 27, with the repetition of the German word "Ich."

In other places, the alliteration feels more intentional, like the /b/, /g/ , and /f/ sounds that stretch across the second and third stanzas:

> ... a bag full of God,
> Ghastly statue with one gray toe
> Big as a Frisco seal
>
> And a head in the freakish Atlantic
> Where it pours bean green over blue
> In the waters off beautiful Nauset.

This alliteration of /b/, /g/, and /f/ sounds here helps hold the image together even as it unfolds across multiple lines and a stanza break. Of course, even here, the alliteration is not the only form of repetition present—there is also consonance and assonance at work (and in fact, alliteration in this example is actually *also* consonance, because the /b/, /g/, and /f/ sounds also appear *within* words, not just at the *beginnings* of words).

Other times alliteration serves to emphasize various phrases and draw connections between words. The /b/ sounds of "bright blue" in line 44 underscore the intensity of the color of father's "Aryan eye," for example, and a similar thing happens with the /m/ sounds in lines 64-65:

> I made a model of you,
> A man in black with a Meinkampf look

The /s/ sounds (technically, the sibilance) of lines 46-47 create a sense of muffling, reflecting the way that no light can filter through the darkness of the father's image:

> Not God but a swastika
> So black no sky could squeak through.

The line itself feels hushed, smothered, much like the speaker has felt when living underneath a certain oppressive idea of her father.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "do," "do," "do," "do"
- **Line 3:** "lived like"
- **Lines 3-4:** "foot / For"
- **Line 5:** "daring"
- **Line 6:** "Daddy," "have had"
- **Line 7:** "died"
- **Line 8:** "bag," "full," "God"
- **Line 9:** "Ghastly," "gray"
- **Line 10:** "Big," "Frisco"
- **Line 11:** "freakish"
- **Line 12:** "bean," "green," "blue"
- **Line 13:** "beautiful"
- **Line 16:** "tongue," "town"
- **Line 18:** "wars, wars, wars"
- **Line 24:** "talk to"
- **Line 25:** "tongue," "stuck"
- **Line 26:** "stuck," "snare"
- **Line 27:** "Ich, ich, ich, ich"
- **Line 44:** "bright blue"
- **Line 46:** "swastika"
- **Line 47:** "So," "sky," "squeak"
- **Line 49:** "boot"
- **Lines 49-50:** "brute / Brute"
- **Line 50:** "brute"
- **Line 51:** "blackboard"
- **Line 54:** "no," "no not"
- **Line 55:** "black"
- **Line 56:** "Bit," "two"
- **Line 57:** "ten," "buried"
- **Line 58:** "twenty," "tried," "to"
- **Line 59:** "back, back, back"
- **Line 60:** "bones"
- **Line 61:** "But," "sack"
- **Line 62:** "stuck," "together," "glue"
- **Line 64:** "made," "model"
- **Line 65:** "man," "black," "Meinkampf," "look"
- **Line 66:** "love"

ANADIPLOSIS

Anadiplosis is one of the many kinds of repetition that appears in the poem. Anadiplosis can be used to create a more insistent, persuasive tone, as we see in the first two lines of the poem. The speaker begins by stating, "You do not do," then elaborates on this thought just slightly by saying, "You do not do / Any more." (Note that this might repetition might also be thought of as epizeuxis; more important than terminology is the effect such repetition has on the poem.)

The addition of "Any more" implies that the speaker has put up with her situation for some time, and is only now putting her foot down. Because of the way the lines are broken, the poem begins with what appears to be a simple repetition, when in fact the phrase is being altered the second time around. This is

indicative of the poem's whole endeavor: the speaker appears to reenact her relationship with her father by marrying a man who treats her in the same way, but actually she is able to move *forward* through her repetition by *adding* to it—recreating that relationship allows her the power to choose *differently* this time around.

Similarly, in lines 30-33, the use of anadiplosis allows Plath to build a logical progression that is easy for the reader to follow, and which also creates a rhythmic, insistent effect, again largely due to her choice of line breaks:

> And the language obscene
> An engine, an engine
> Chuffing me off like a Jew.
> A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.

Here, anadiplosis allows the speaker to elaborate on the metaphor of the German language being an engine while also making dramatic use of the repetition of "an engine." By isolating the repeated phrase to its own line, emphasis is given to the repetition before the rest of the thought unfolds. This again draws attention to the way repetition itself is used as a kind of propulsive force in the poem—only by repeating itself is it able to move forward. One might say repetition is its own kind of engine!

And this anadiplosis is immediately followed by another. The repetition of "A Jew" functions very similarly to the other two instances of anadiplosis. The difference here is that instead of the repeated word or phrase being isolated to a single line, it instead is broken across lines, so that it ends one line and begins another.

It's worth taking a second to see what this passage might look like without the use of anadiplosis:

> And the language obscene
> An engine
> Chuffing me off like a Jew
> to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.

Notice that Plath *could* have conveyed the same idea without the use of anadiplosis. The repetition isn't necessary to the *logical meaning* of this passage, but rather it creates a certain effect that influences the reader's *experience* of what the speaker is feeling.

Anadiplosis appears again towards the end of the poem, in lines 71-74 ("If I've killed ... if you want to know."), but because of the line breaks, much less emphasis is given to the repeated elements ("I've killed" and "year"). Both are instances where the speaker is not just relating her experience, but attempting to be as exact as she can about the particulars. This speaks to the poem's thematic concerns around getting to the truth. It takes more than one attempt for the speaker to puncture the illusion of her father's power, and more than one attempt for her to relate her own truth.

Where Anadiplosis appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "You do not do, you do not do"
- **Line 31:** "An engine, an engine"
- **Line 32:** "a Jew."
- **Line 33:** "A Jew"
- **Line 71:** "If I've killed one man, I've killed two—"
- **Lines 73-74:** "year, / Seven years"

ANAPHORA

Anaphora in this poem coincides with many of the other repetitive devices at play. There are several places in the poem, however, where anaphora is employed more clearly on its own.

Take lines 43 and 44, for example:

> And your neat mustache
> And your Aryan eye, bright blue.

The repetition of "And your" in these lines builds off of the initial statement in lines 41 and 42, "I have always been scared of *you*, / With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo." The anaphora reflects the parallelism seen in line 42. In terms of what is being conveyed, the speaker is just adding on to the list of things about her father that scare her. Plath *could* have chosen to create another exactly parallel statement, so that the passage read, "With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo. / With your neat mustache, your Aryan eye bright blue." This would have had a similar effect, but instead she chose to break up the rhythm while still employing repetition. It's a subtle difference, but it's choices like these that keep the poem from lapsing into predictability.

There are several other examples of anaphora in the poem. They all act fairly similarly. The repetition of the word "And" at the beginning of lines 62-63 ("And they stuck me together with glue. / And then I knew what to do.") and lines 66-67 ("And a love of the rack and the screw. And I said I do, I do.") act as a propulsive mechanism, moving the poem forward and giving it a sense of momentum. They also imply a sense of accumulation, of one thing leading to another. It creates a feeling of inevitability because there is little time for the reader to stop and consider where things might go—the poem pulls the reader along urgently to its conclusion.

Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 16:** "In the," "in the"
- **Line 34:** "I"
- **Line 35:** "I"
- **Line 36:** "The," "the"

- **Line 43:** "And your"
- **Line 44:** "And your"
- **Line 62:** "And"
- **Line 63:** "And"
- **Line 66:** "And"
- **Line 67:** "And"
- **Line 78:** "They"
- **Line 79:** "They"

ASSONANCE

Plath uses assonance liberally in this poem. The assonance created by the repetition of /oo/ sounds is responsible for the poem's abundance of end rhyme, which in effect creates the sing-song quality of a nursery rhyme. Over half of the lines in the poem end in assonance. Additionally, at times assonance occurs *within* a line as well as at the end, creating an even more sonically intense passage, such as in lines 49-50:

> The **boot** in the face, the **brute**
> **Brute** heart of a **brute** like **you**.

In this case, the assonance created by the /oo/ sounds in "boot," "brute," and "you" are even further intensified by the use of diacope—here seen in the repetition of the word "brute." Together with consonance and alliteration, the assonance helps build a sonic intensity that reflects the speaker's deep frustration and rage at the brutality of oppression experienced by herself and so many women.

While the poem is certainly dominated by the repetition of /oo/ sounds at the ends of lines and even within lines, it does also contain other instances of assonance. At the end of the first stanza there is the subtle assonance of short /a/ sounds in "Barely daring." This assonance coincides with the consonance of /b/ and /d/ sounds, together contributing to the strong sing-song rhythm of the first stanza.

There are many other subtle moments of assonance, such as the /ee/ sounds in "freakish," "bean," and "green", and the /aw/ sounds in "waters," "off," and "Nauset" in the second stanza. These moments accumulate over the course of the poem, contributing to its overall sense of intense repetition.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "You do," "do," "you do," "do"
- **Line 2:** "shoe"
- **Line 5:** "Barely daring," "Achoo"
- **Line 6:** "Daddy," "have had"
- **Line 7:** "died," "I," "time"
- **Line 9:** "Ghastly statue"
- **Line 11:** "freakish"
- **Line 12:** "bean green," "blue"
- **Line 13:** "waters off," "beautiful," "Nauset"
- **Line 14:** "you"
- **Line 15:** "du"
- **Line 21:** "two"
- **Line 22:** "you"
- **Line 23:** "Put," "foot," "root"
- **Line 24:** "you"
- **Line 25:** "tongue," "stuck"
- **Line 26:** "stuck"
- **Line 29:** "you"
- **Line 32:** "Jew"
- **Line 34:** "Jew"
- **Line 35:** "Jew"
- **Line 36:** "snows," "Tyrol," "clear beer"
- **Line 37:** "true"
- **Line 40:** "Jew"
- **Line 41:** "you"
- **Line 42:** "gobbledygoo"
- **Line 44:** "blue"
- **Line 45:** "You"
- **Line 46:** "God," "swastika"
- **Line 47:** "through"
- **Line 49:** "boot," "brute"
- **Line 50:** "Brute," "brute," "you"
- **Line 52:** "you"
- **Line 53:** "foot"
- **Line 54:** "less," "devil"
- **Line 55:** "less," "who"
- **Line 56:** "red," "two"
- **Line 57:** "ten when," "you"
- **Line 58:** "twenty," "I tried," "die"
- **Line 59:** "get," "back, back, back," "you"
- **Line 60:** "do"
- **Line 62:** "glue"
- **Line 63:** "knew," "do"
- **Line 64:** "you"
- **Line 66:** "screw"
- **Line 67:** "do," "do"
- **Line 68:** "through"
- **Line 69:** "root"
- **Line 70:** "through"
- **Line 71:** "two"
- **Line 72:** "you"
- **Line 74:** "you"
- **Line 75:** "Daddy," "back"
- **Line 76:** "fat black"
- **Line 77:** "you"
- **Line 78:** "dancing," "stamping," "you"
- **Line 79:** "knew," "you"
- **Line 80:** "Daddy, daddy, you bastard," "through"

CONSONANCE

As with assonance, consonance is used frequently throughout

the poem, often appearing alongside a myriad of other repetitive devices, sometimes in direct relation to other devices. In the first 13 lines of the poem, stretching across nearly three stanzas, there is a nearly overwhelming consonance of /d/, /b/, /f/, and /g/ sounds (as well as some less obvious consonance created by the repetition of /t/ sounds in the first stanza).

This consonance creates a noticeable texture to the poem—it doesn't roll of the tongue but rather requires a good deal of effort to read aloud. It may even intentionally gesture toward "the German tongue" which the speaker finds so oppressive.

In fact some of the most noticeable moments of consonance seem to correspond with the speaker's attitude toward her oppressor, such as the /s/ and /k/ sounds in lines 46-47, which are intensified by the presence of assonance as well (the /aw/ sounds in "God" and "swastika"):

> Not God but a swastika
> So black no sky could squeak through.

It is very difficult to ignore the heightened intensity in these lines, in large part because of the difficulty created by consonance. There is a feeling of landing in these lines, as if they are a response to everything that has come before them. The speaker has finally seen through the mythology of her father to who her father really was. She has finally connected her own experience to a context.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "do," "do," "do," "do"
- **Line 3:** "lived like"
- **Lines 3-4:** "foot / For thirty years, poor"
- **Line 5:** "Barely daring," "breathe"
- **Line 6:** "Daddy," "have had"
- **Line 7:** "died," "had"
- **Line 8:** "Marble-heavy," "bag full of God"
- **Line 9:** "Ghastly statue"
- **Lines 9-10:** "gray toe / Big"
- **Line 10:** "Frisco"
- **Line 11:** "freakish," "Atlantic"
- **Line 12:** "bean green," "blue"
- **Line 13:** "off beautiful Nauset"
- **Line 16:** "tongue," "town"
- **Line 17:** "Scraped," "roller"
- **Line 18:** "wars, wars, wars"
- **Line 19:** "name," "town," "common"
- **Line 21:** "two"
- **Line 22:** "tell"
- **Line 23:** "Put," "foot," "root"
- **Line 24:** "talk to"
- **Line 25:** "tongue stuck"
- **Line 26:** "stuck," "barb wire snare"
- **Line 27:** "Ich, ich, ich, ich"
- **Line 28:** "could," "speak"
- **Lines 31-32:** "An engine, an engine / Chuffing"
- **Line 32:** "off," "Jew"
- **Line 33:** "Jew"
- **Line 36:** "clear beer"
- **Line 37:** "very pure or true"
- **Line 38:** "gipsy ancestress," "luck"
- **Line 39:** "Taroc pack," "Taroc pack"
- **Line 44:** "bright blue"
- **Line 46:** "swastika"
- **Line 47:** "So black," "sky could squeak"
- **Line 48:** "Fascist"
- **Line 49:** "boot," "face"
- **Lines 49-50:** "brute / Brute heart"
- **Line 50:** "brute"
- **Line 51:** "blackboard," "daddy"
- **Line 52:** "picture"
- **Line 53:** "cleft"
- **Line 54:** "But," "less," "devil," "no not"
- **Line 55:** "less," "black man"
- **Line 56:** "Bit," "pretty red heart," "two"
- **Line 57:** "ten," "buried"
- **Line 58:** "At twenty," "tried to"
- **Line 59:** "back, back, back"
- **Line 60:** "bones"
- **Line 61:** "sack"
- **Line 62:** "stuck"
- **Line 64:** "made," "model"
- **Line 65:** "man in black," "Meinkampf look"
- **Line 66:** "love," "rack," "screw"
- **Line 67:** "said," "do," "do"
- **Line 68:** "daddy"
- **Line 69:** "telephone's off"
- **Line 71:** "killed," "killed"
- **Line 73:** "drank," "blood"
- **Line 75:** "can," "back"
- **Line 76:** "stake," "black"
- **Line 77:** "villagers never," "liked"
- **Line 78:** "dancing," "stamping"
- **Line 80:** "Daddy, daddy," "bastard"

EPISTROPHE

Yet another form of repetition, epistrophe pops up just a couple of times in this poem. In lines 32-40, multiple sentences end with the words "a Jew." This repetition not only contributes to the assonance at the ends of lines, it also reflects the speaker's growing awareness that her relationship to her father is an oppressive one.

The first time the speaker compares herself to a Jew, it is more of a comparison than an identification. The use of the word "like" indicates that the comparison is meant to draw a

relationship between two unlike things—in other words, it is a simile.

As the speaker identifies more and more with the plight of Jewish people, however, she moves from comparison to *identification*, from simile to metaphor. Not only does trying to speak her father's language cause her to "talk like a Jew" (i.e., with the difficulty of the oppressed), but she "may well be a Jew." In other words, she doesn't just *feel* oppressed; her felt experience is indicative of the fact that she is in fact not free. The use of epistrophe tracks this evolution of the speaker's relationship to the idea of being oppressed.

At the end of the poem, there is another occurrence of epistrophe with the repetition of the word "you." The speaker has been addressing her father's powerful memory throughout the poem, but at this point in the poem, the tables have been turned. The speaker dramatizes the act of seeing through her father's mythology by imagining a village of oppressed people who have triumphed against their oppressor, who in this metaphor is a vampire. The oppressor—who is both the speaker's "Daddy" as well as the speaker's vampire husband—has a stake through his heart and the villagers are celebrating his death by "dancing and stamping" on him.

Because of the construction of the lines, the villagers' actions occur at the beginning of the sentence while the "you" becomes passive, acted upon. This is very effective in underlining the speaker's final proclamation of being through with her father's legacy.

Where Epistrophe appears in the poem:

- **Line 32:** "a Jew."
- **Line 34:** "a Jew."
- **Line 35:** "a Jew."
- **Line 40:** "a Jew."
- **Line 77:** "you."
- **Line 78:** "you."
- **Line 79:** "you."

EPIZEUXIS

Plath uses epizeuxis frequently and to great effect. It often overlaps with other forms of repetition, and in a couple of cases is the result of anadiplosis, such as in the first line and in line 32, "An engine, an engine."

The effect of epizeuxis is quite different depending on the number of times a word or phrase is repeated, and how the line is broken. Sometimes the effect is more rhythmic, other times more obviously dramatic. The repetition of the word "wars" in line 18 points to the wars being not only plural, but seemingly never-ending. A similar repetition occurs in line 59 ("And get back, back, back to you); the word "back" is repeated three times, emphasizing the impossible distance the speaker would have had to traverse to reach her father in death.

The repetition of the word "Ich" (German for "I") in the sixth stanza, which makes up its own line entirely, dramatizes the speaker's inability to communicate with her father, the impossibility of expressing herself in his language. In contrast, line 39—"And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack"—seems to have mostly a rhythmic effect, though it does also contribute to the overall sense of the speaker's compulsion for repetition.

Of course, the rhythmic effect of epizeuxis often lends itself to dramatic moments in the poem, such as in line 45: "Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You—". The repetition of "Panzer-man" feels both rhythmic *and* insistent. It creates a momentum that leads to that leap indicated by the em dash—the speaker is finally ready to make her accusation. Equally insistent is her marriage vow—"And I said, I do, I do." This repetition underlines her eagerness to bring her father back to life, an act she must perform in order to kill him. Finally, in the last line, this same insistence is present in the repetition of "Daddy, daddy" that precedes her statement of termination ("I'm through."). The repetition makes the statement more emotional, more forceful, and more rhythmically satisfying.

Where Epizeuxis appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "You do not do, you do not do"
- **Line 18:** "wars, wars, wars."
- **Line 27:** "Ich, ich, ich, ich,"
- **Line 31:** "An engine, an engine"
- **Line 39:** "And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack"
- **Line 45:** "Panzer-man, panzer-man"
- **Lines 49-50:** "brute / Brute"
- **Line 59:** "back, back, back"
- **Line 67:** "I do, I do."
- **Line 80:** "Daddy, daddy,"

DIACOPE

Diacope in this poem often overlaps with other forms of repetition—parallelism, anadiplosis, epistrophe, and so forth.

This is obvious, for example, with the repetition of "do" in the first line of the poem (technically also antanaclasis, since the "do" means something different when it appears after "You" than when it appears after "not"). Similarly, in the fifth stanza the parallel structure between "So I never could tell where you" and "I never could talk to you" as well as between "Put your foot" and "your root" leads to diacope.

There is also diacope with the repetition of the word "stuck" in lines 25-26 ("The tongue stuck in my jaw. // It stuck in a barb wire snare.") This allows the speaker to move from the literal image of a tongue being stuck in a jaw to a figurative rendering of the tongue being stuck in a snare, while still maintaining the central notion of being caught or trapped. The reader descends into the logic of the metaphor without getting lost, the repeated word acting as a kind of bridge.

Like parallelism and anadiplosis, diacope can be used in such a way that the reader is able to more easily follow the speaker's train of thought. In lines 53-56, the speaker recalls a picture of her father, saying "A cleft in your chin instead of your foot / But no less a devil for that, no not / Any less the black man who / Bit my pretty red heart in two." The repetition of the word "less" again allows the reader to follow the speaker's progression from realizing that her father doesn't have to *look* like a devil to *be* one, to realizing that he is in essence the same as her husband, a "man in black" who loves to torture her.

This progression is then reflected later on when the speaker declares, "If I've killed one man, I've killed two—" This could have been written differently; for instance, the speaker could have said "I've killed not one man, but two." The repetition of "I've killed" is more effective, and also necessary here because of the qualifying "If." The first clause is *dependent* on the second clause; she's either killed two men, or none at all. This allows a bit of uncertainty into the poem, as if the speaker is not quite certain of whether or not she is really free of her tormentor.

Where Diacope appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "do," "do," "do," "do"
- **Line 22:** "I never could"
- **Line 23:** "your," "your"
- **Line 24:** "I never could"
- **Line 25:** "stuck"
- **Line 26:** "stuck"
- **Line 32:** "Jew"
- **Line 34:** "Jew"
- **Line 35:** "Jew"
- **Line 49:** "brute"
- **Line 50:** "Brute," "brute"
- **Line 54:** "less"
- **Line 55:** " less"
- **Line 71:** "killed," "killed"
- **Line 73:** "year"
- **Line 74:** " years"

ONOMATOPOEIA

Onomatopoeia plays a pretty strong role in this poem, despite the fact that it only appears a few times. At the end of the first stanza, the word "Achoo" is an example of onomatopoeia, as the sound of the word "Achoo" evokes the sound of a sneeze. This lends a childishness to the speaker's claim, as one can imagine a child referring to a sneeze as an "Achoo." The sound of the word "Achoo" also foreshadows the "choo choo" of a steam engine train, the train being an important image that appears in the seventh stanza of the poem.

The speaker describes the German language as "an engine, an engine / Chuffing me off like a Jew." The word "Chuffing" here is also an example of onomatopoeia, as it echoes the sound of steam exiting the smoke stack of a train. The word "chuffing" evokes the train while again lending a childlike tone to the poem, a tone that further emphasizes the speaker's powerlessness in relation to her father.

The third example of onomatopoeia in the poem arrives in the ninth stanza, when the speaker admits "I have always been scared of *you*, / With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo." This could be interpreted as a subtle commentary on the way that the propaganda surrounding the Nazi regime, when examined closely, turned out to be pure nonsense. The word "gobbledygoo" refers to both overcomplicated language that is difficult to understand and also to something that is simply gibberish. In the latter definition, the word evokes what it is: "gobbledygook" *sounds* like nonsense, made-up sounds that have no meaning.

Furthermore, "gobbledygoo" isn't even actually a word—the correct spelling of the word is *gobbledygook*. Without the "k," however, "Gobbledygoo," *sounds* like baby talk, which one can imagine the father directing to the speaker. This baby talk takes on an ominous quality because the speaker is scared of her father and his language represents her oppression.

Where Onomatopoeia appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "Achoo"
- **Line 32:** "Chuffing"
- **Line 42:** "gobbledygoo"

VOCABULARY

Ghastly (Line 9) - Terrible or frightful; causing fear.

Frisco (Line 10) - A nickname for the city of San Francisco, California.

Nauset (Line 13) - A coastal town located in Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

Ach, du (Line 15) - German for "Oh, you."

Polack (Line 20) - An ethnic slur for a person of Polish descent.

Barb wire (Line 26) - A kind of wire featuring sharp, pointed bits of metal throughout. It is used for livestock fences to make them impassable, and was also used for concentration camps during World War II to keep prisoners from escaping.

Ich (Line 27) - The German word for "I."

Chuffing (Line 32) - Refers to the sound a steam engine train makes as it moves.

Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen (Line 33) - Three of the deadliest concentration camps used by the Nazis in World War II.

Tyrol (Line 36) - May refer to the federal state of Tyrol in western Austria and/or the historical region of Tyrol, which spread across the Alps in Northern Italy and western Austria.

Vienna (Line 36) - The capital city of Austria.

Gipsy (Line 38) - An ethnic slur for the Romani people, a traditionally nomadic ethnic group that was targeted by the Nazis during WWII.

Taroc pack (Line 39) - An Italian card game, first developed in the 1300s, consisting of four suits and 22 tarot cards. "Tarot" cards feature various figures and symbols often used in fortune-telling.

Luftwaffe (Line 42) - The German air force during World War II.

Gobbledygoo (Line 42) - "Gobbledygoo," or gobbledygook, is language that is difficult to understand, characterized by technical jargon, and/or obtuse vocabulary/turns of phrase. It may also refer to language that is simply nonsensical.

Aryan (Line 44) - A term the Nazis employed to describe a "master race" of non-Jewish Caucasians, a race characterized by Nordic features (white skin, fair hair, blue eyes).

Panzer-man (Line 45) - A "panzer" was an armored attack vehicle used by the Germans in World War II. A "panzer-man" would be the soldier manning this vehicle.

Swastika (Line 46) - The official emblem of the Nazi party during Hitler's regime.

Fascist (Line 48) - A "Fascist" is someone who believes in or upholds Fascism. Fascism refers to a political philosophy or regime distinguished by authoritarianism (i.e., centralized power and limited political, religious, or social freedom), extreme nationalism, and the violent oppression of any resistance or dissent.

Brute (Line 49, Line 50) - Inhuman; a beast or a monster. The word is also used as an adjective here to mean savage or or beastly.

Cleft (Line 53) - In this instance, Plath is employing two different definitions of the word "cleft." A "cleft chin" refers to an anatomical trait where a person has a dimple in the middle of their chin. Though the speaker describes "a cleft in your chin instead of your foot," the speaker is not referring to a cleft foot (which is a congenital deformity in human beings) but rather alluding to the cloven hoof of a devil. This becomes clear contextually when she comes to the conclusion that her father is "no less a devil" because the cloven hoof is not visible.

Meinkampf (Line 65) - *Mein Kampf* (German for *My Struggle)* is the name of Adolf Hitler's autobiography and political manifesto, in which he put forth his plan for German dominion.

The rack and the screw (Line 66) - "The rack and the screw" references a torture device which has been used since antiquity. There is also a double entendre here as both "rack" and "screw" have sexual connotations, and "screw" can also refer to cheating someone.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Daddy" consists of 16 cinquains (five-line stanzas). Apart from that, the poem is not written in any traditional poetic form. The regularity of its stanza lengths, combined with the frequent use of short lines, repetition, and end rhyme, nevertheless evokes the sensation of listening to a nursery rhyme, or at least to something that is tightly controlled. The poem has a compulsive and claustrophobic feel, which echoes the speaker's feelings of being constrained by her father's memory and her place as a woman in a patriarchal society.

METER

The poem's meter is inconsistent. The number of syllables per line ranges anywhere from two to thirteen, though most lines tend to be between seven and nine syllables.

There are *moments* of meter throughout the poem, however; the most obvious being the first line:

You do | not do, | you do | not do

This line is in iambic tetrameter, meaning it is comprised of four iambs (poetic feet with a da-dum syllable pattern). Because it is the first line of the poem, this might set up the expectation of regular meter throughout the rest of the poem. However, the next line ("Any more, black shoe") immediately undercuts this expectation, as it follows no set meter. The third line again has four feet, but unlike the first line, it is not in iambic tetrameter:

In which | I have lived | like a foot

This line begins with an iamb followed by two anapests (da-da-dum). The last two lines in the stanza then have seven and nine syllables, respectively; there's no overall pattern.

That said, because most of the lines in the poem fall between seven and nine syllables, it is noticeable when a line is considerably shorter or longer than the average. For instance, line 15 is comprised of two syllables, which form a single trochee (dum-da):

Ach, du

The effect of such a short line is that it feels almost like a resting point before launching into the next part of the poem. There is a sense of the speaker's admiration here (Ach, du means "Oh, you" in German), but also a sense of her weariness. On the opposite end of the spectrum is line 36 ("The snows ... Vienna) which at thirteen syllables is the longest line in the poem.

The prevalence of lines that fall between seven and nine

syllables throughout the rest of the poem mimics the regimentation of peoples' lives that happens under Fascist authority. The longer lines seem to hearken back to freedoms that have since been stripped away.

RHYME SCHEME

Because the use of rhyme does not follow a set pattern, "Daddy" cannot be said to have a rhyme scheme. However, the poem does rely heavily on the use of end-rhyme and assonance—in this case the repetition of /oo/ sounds—to add a sense of rhythm.

Over half of the poem's 80 lines end with an /oo/ sound, such as those created by the words "do," "shoe," and "Achoo" in the first stanza. This intensity of sound is a propulsive force in the poem, and perhaps even reminiscent of the sound of a steam engine train, an image which is important to the poem. (The regularity of the stanzas also could be seen to mimic the individual cars of a train.)

The heavy use of end-rhyme, combined with the poem's short lines, repetition, and the repeated use of the word "Daddy," also contributes to the childlike tone of the poem. The speaker feels stuck inside a childlike awe of her father. She is not only trying to break free of her father's hold on her, but of a cycle of abuse which has been passed down through generations. This cycle plays out in the way the speaker recreates her relationship with her father by marrying a man who is also violent and oppressive. And this cycle shows up formally through the intense repetitive elements of the poem, especially the end rhyme.

SPEAKER

The speaker of "Daddy" is a 30-year-old woman who has been fixated on her father's death since childhood, and who realizes that she must puncture the godlike image she has of her father in order to be free of his oppressive hold on her. The speaker has a complicated relationship with her father, as he died before she had a chance to see him clearly. The poem chronicles her journey from being so enthralled by her father that she wanted to die so they could be reunited, to realizing that she is terrified of him, to bringing him back to life in the form of a husband, to finally "killing" the idol that she has made of him.

Many readers have taken the speaker to be Plath herself. Plath did indeed write a great deal about her father, Otto Plath; in one journal entry she noted that "He ... heiled Hitler in the privacy of his home." In an interview with the BBC about "Daddy," Plath described the speaker as "a girl with an Electra complex [whose] father died while she thought he was God. Her case is complicated by the fact that her father was also a Nazi and her mother very possibly part Jewish. In the daughter the two strains marry and paralyze each other—she has to act out the awful little allegory once over before she is free of it."

There are plenty of details in the poem supporting an autobiographical reading. The German-born Otto Plath had undiagnosed diabetes that led to gangrene of the foot, something alluded to by the "Ghastly statue with one gray toe" of line 9. Plath's mother was of Austrian descent, a fact that perhaps informs the speaker's rejection of the "the clear beer of Vienna" in line 36. Otto Plath died from diabetes complications when his daughter was eight years old; the speaker of the poem is also a child when her father dies. He was also a professor, echoed by the reference to the speaker's father standing "at the blackboard" in line 51. Finally, Plath grew up in Massachusetts, not terribly far from the town of Nauset mentioned in line 13.

SETTING

Because of how intensely internal the poem is, it is difficult to pinpoint a singular, external setting. There is, however, a very vivid emotional landscape which pulls from a variety of historical, contemporary, and mythological settings.

The poem begins with the speaker addressing the situation in which she lives, a situation she describes with imagery borrowed from an English nursery rhyme—a woman living a cramped life in a shoe. This imagery goes hand-in-hand with the poem's nursery rhyme structure, which lends itself to an interpretation of the poem where the speaker has been infantilized and constricted by patriarchy (for more on this, head to the Form section of this guide).

From there, the poem shifts to a contemporary setting. The speaker describes her father as a statue with its head in the Atlantic Ocean, with a toe she compares to a seal in San Francisco. While the imagery is still internal and imaginative (her father isn't literally a statue, nor is he located in the Atlantic), it's referring to the real world the speaker inhabits, and even utilizes a nickname for San Francisco ("Frisco").

As the poem progresses, the speaker begins to identify her situation with the persecution of Jewish people by Nazis during World War II. At this point, the poem begins to employ a more historical setting that evokes this war: steam engine trains transporting Jews to concentration camps, her father's affiliations with the Nazi air force and panzer unit, and the swastika, which was the official emblem for the Nazi regime.

Finally, in the last two stanzas, the poem turns to a more mythological setting, again emphasizing that the struggle of the poem is an internal one. The speaker refers to her husband as a vampire and describes puncturing her image of her father as driving a stake through his heart. There is no actual village and there are no actual villagers; the speaker is simply imagining a scene in which those who have been oppressed are now triumphing over their oppressor.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"Daddy" was written in 1963, just months before Plath's death by suicide. In the last few years of her life, Plath has been reading work from contemporaries such as Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, and W.D. Snodgrass. In the work of her contemporaries Plath found inspiration to draw more from personal experience, and to address previously taboo subjects such as mental illness and struggles with marriage. This move towards more personal subject matter would come to be coined "Confessionalism," a term which some poets embraced and others rejected. In theory, Confessionalism describes a more autobiographical poem, a poem stemming from real experience in the poet's life, deeply psychological in nature.

Confessionalism has become controversial as poets have pushed back against the label. Who decides what is Confessional and what isn't? More and more scholars argue against limiting the scope of Plath's poetry to the purely autobiographical realm, insisting that doing so is a huge disservice to her work. Some critics suggest that it is more helpful to think of Confessionalism in terms of what was happening historically.

Plath and her contemporaries were writing during the height of the Cold War, a time when people simply didn't speak about a whole array of personal subjects as no one wanted to draw attention to themselves. It was a time of intense conformity and stifling pretense.

Poets like Plath helped to puncture the veneer of normalcy and sameness that characterized the late '50s and early '60s by allowing readers to see their own intimate experiences portrayed out in the open. While "Confessional" is no longer (and never really was) an appropriate way to describe the work of poets like Plath, who was writing just as intentionally about systems of oppression as she was about personal experiences in her life, it is fair to say that her work has had a profound impact on literature as readers know it today. In a sense, Plath's work and the work of other so-called "Confessional" poets opened a can of worms that has since remained open—there is no longer any subject that "can't" or "shouldn't" be addressed in a poem.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Plath came of age during one of the most constrictive times in American history. America in the 1950s, and particularly suburban America, where Plath was raised, was a place of stifling social expectations and enormous pressure to conform to whatever was considered "normal." While men aspired to do and be whatever they wanted, women were under extraordinary strain to look and act a certain way, to keep themselves sexually "pure" for marriage, and to set aside their own needs and desires in the service of creating the perfect domestic life promised to men in the wake of World War II.

Plath wrote extensively about these pressures, and about the double standard for men and women, not only in her poetry but also in her novel, *The Bell Jar*. This pressure led to many promising young people, particularly women, suffering from mental breakdowns when they couldn't reconcile their needs and desires with the demands of society.

Plath herself suffered immensely from this pressure, struggling with mental illness and suicidal ideation her whole life—a struggle which ultimately caused her to take her own life in 1963, four months after "Daddy" was written. While Plath's work is often read through the lens of her tragic death, it is important that readers keep in mind the historical circumstances which contextualize her depression and eventual suicide.

In addition to shaping the world that she grew up in, World War II was significant to Plath because of her own ancestry. Her father, Otto Plath, was a German immigrant who may very well have nursed pro-Nazi sympathies. Like the father in "Daddy," Otto Plath died when Sylvia Plath was a young girl. Her mother, Aurelia Plath, was of Austrian descent. The poem's interest in the Holocaust, then, is not just metaphorical; Plath was invested in better understanding her own roots.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- The Poem Out Loud — "Daddy" as read by Sylvia Plath for BBC Radio. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fIxpYzPq070)
- Who was Otto Plath? — A Guardian article regarding the inspiration for "Daddy": Plath's own father, Otto Plath. (https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/aug/17/sylvia-plath-otto-father-files)
- Biography and More Poems — A biographical account of Plath's life and additional poems, courtesy of the Poetry Foundation. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/sylvia-plath)
- A Short Introduction to Plath's Poetry — Benjamin Voigt breaks down a few of Plath's most famous poems. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/70268/sylvia-plath-101)
- An Interview With the Poet — A 1962 interview with Sylvia Plath, conducted by Peter Orr. (https://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/content/1962-sylvia-plath-interview-peter-orr)
- Confessionalism — A brief introduction to Confessionalism, a poetic moment that helps contextualize

Plath's work. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/collections/151109/an-introduction-to-confessional-poetry)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER SYLVIA PLATH POEMS

- Fever 103°
- Lady Lazarus
- Mad Girl's Love Song
- The Applicant
- The Arrival of the Bee Box

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