

I Wash The Shirt Poem Interpretation

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Central Thesis and Visual Imagery

Thesis Statement: "I wash the shirt create a good visual picture and suggests that life continues in various colors and smells.

Anna Swir and the Context of the Poem

"I Wash the Shirt" is a short composition written by famous Polish poet Anna Swir, which varies greatly in length. She wrote about sensuality, women's body, and war and her writings dive down into the power and frailty of the spirit of a woman. Her poems are always simple, direct, and focused, with insightful reverence for life and lacking traditional poetic superfluities. The most exclusive feature of her writings is that she frequently paints images in our observance so touchable and real that it is guaranteed to leave us breathless for sentiments that we may not have known presented inside us. Being born in poverty during the Nazi control of Poland, her poetry has concerted on the subjects of war, the pursuit of pleasure, motherhood, and themes of her private life. During WWI, the author participated in the resistance movement by Polish people as a lady nurse, where she transcribed her verses for covert publications. Her poetry is greatly influenced by this wartime and her childhood experience. She lived in poverty with her father, who was an artist and fully experienced the burdens of World Wars. But unlike many other writings of that time, her poetry is very tender and family-oriented. The poem "I Wash the Shirt", which will be analyzed in this essay, deeply expresses her feelings toward her father. ("I Wash the Shirt", 2020)

Grief and the Final Farewell

The poem "I Wash the Shirt" revolves around the author's private life, in which she describes the last goodbye to her dearly loved father. She uses a unique tone to describe her goodbye, saying emotion even after she has already had to say bye. The reason behind the selection of this poem is the creation of strong emotion inside me because it is related to a girl who lost her during a tough economic period. The nineteen lines of this poem are beautifully expressing the author who is faced with letting go of her father's last touchable piece. The poem depicts how her father's smell was unique to her, and she will never get to feel that another time. The pieces of stuff of the deceased, mainly garments, arouse a strong expressive response when the departed is closely attached to you. The shirt is used as a symbol to define the deep emotional connection between the daughter and father following the father's soul departure. I adored the unique feeling she brought into an article of clothing left behind by her dad.

Emotional Appeal and Personal Loss

Anna Swir enables the readers to realize the conditions she faced during her personal life after the departure of her father. In the way the poet directed her emotions, the poem is very appealing to the mind of a reader. The personal relationship the author had with her father, indicated by the shirt, is actually a representation of memorizing the departed loved ones. The author used different styles of poetry, like alluding to alliteration to this private relationship she had with the shirt of her father. For example, the third line of this poem, “The shirt smells of sweat”, is like an alliteration that expresses the solid fragrance that appeals to the senses of the person who reads and additionally makes stronger the association between daughter and father.

The Shirt as a Symbol of Mourning

“I wash the shirt” is so expressive because it signifies a daughter who has lost her dad and is facing a heartbroken progression. She must have taken a look at the belongings her father left behind and simultaneously washed off the perspiration from dresses that retell her of the father’s departure. In 2nd stanza of the poem, she writes, “From among all bodies in the world,–animal, human,–only one exuded that sweat”, which reveals the solid association that happened between them to the degree that the author established an irreplaceable mode of differentiating her father from other worldly-wise physiques.

Scent Memory and the Destruction of Remembrance

The private relationship of the writer with the shirt via the fragrance of perspiration is narrowly associated with the father. Through this, she recognizes that the shirt washing will symbolically remove all the reminiscences she had connected with her leaving father. For that reason, she states in the second stanza (5th and 6th line), “Washing this shirt–I destroy it–forever”. Shirt washing, on the one hand, is comprehended as ending the only relation the author has with the father, but on the other hand, shirt washing can be considered a new climate of hope for the author. In this situation, the author is coming to terms with her private sorrow and thus opening the gate for new involvements. She puts an end to the shirt so as not ever to feel the aroma that enables her father to come alive again and decides at the end that the only thing that “survives his father” is the oil smell on paintings. The author, at this point, clues that the oil smell is yet an additional fragrance that will remind her of her father. Possibly, the metaphors produced in the “smell of oils” are very anonymous as the paintings are just artistic productions of her father, which is tolerable relative to the scent of perspiration on the shirt, which is distinctive and natural.

Conclusion on the Father-Daughter Bond

To keep the discussion concise, this short poem by Anna Swir revolves around the matchless bond between a daughter and a father, where Anna uses the shirt as a metaphor to denote the existence of her father. "Washing this shirt, I destroy it forever" describes what she lastly brings to an end: the shirt by irregularly washing in so doing, figuratively eliminating the valuable reminiscences linked with the shirt and scattering her father's unforgettable company that revisits with every single washing. Though it can be perceived that shirt washing will end the priceless reminiscences, it can also be perceived as a means to start a new life chapter by coming to terms with her sorrow. The poem is very expressive and rich in colours. If I close my eyes, I can imagine a little girl washing men's shirts and watering them with her own tears. She is crying over the shirt and looking at the paintings made by her dad. Now, they are going to be her only reminders. The new smell of oil mentioned in the last line of the poem creates a new picture of a girl watching paintings of her dad and thinking of her childhood spent in an atelier. Although the poem is very sad, the final lines of it are optimistic. She says that "paintings survive him" meaning that he will be always in his works, and she will always keep them as a memory of her dad. This cheerful note adds tint to the poem, helps a reader to create a good visual picture, and suggests that life continues in various colours and smells. ("I Wash the Shirt", 2020)

References

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