

1981

History: 13

Sharon Olds

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When I found my father that night, the blood
smeared on his head and face, I did not
know who had done it. I had loved his body
whole, his head, his face, untouched,
and now he floated on the couch, his arms
up, like Mussolini hanging
upside down in the air, his head
dangling where they could reach him with boards and their
fingernails, those who had lived
under his tyranny.

I saw how the inside of the body could be
brought to the surface, to cover the skin,
his heart standing on his face, the weight of his
body pressing down on his head,
his life slung in the bag of his scalp,
and who had done it? Had I, had my mother,
my brother, my sister, we who had been silent
under him, under him for years? He lay in his
gore all night, as the body hung all
day outside the gas station in
Milan, and when they helped him up and
washed him and he left, I did not see it—
I was not there for the ashes, I had been there
only for the fire, I had seen my father
strung and mottled, mauled as if taken and
raked by a crowd, and I of the crowd
over his body, and how could anything be
good after that, how could anything be good
in such a world, I turned my back
on happiness, at 13 I entered
a life of mourning, of mourning for the Fascist.