

My papa's waltz



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Theodore Roethke's poem, "My Papa's Waltz", can be quite mystifying in terms of comprehending the exact feeling of the speaker towards his father. Presumably, one would immediately notice the impression created by the author regarding the father. The first line of the poem already suggests the negative image of the father as a drunken man playing with his son. "The whiskey on your breath / Could make a small boy dizzy; / But I hung on like death: / Such waltzing was not easy" (Roethke 30).

The first stanza speaks of the narrator's recollection of the nausea that his father's drunkenness has caused when he was a little boy. After finishing Theodore Roethke's poem, it is quite clear that the speaker implies contrasting emotions of pain and enjoyment of a son's rough dance with his father. However, despite the pain caused by the alcohol smell, he still appreciated his father's efforts in "waltzing" with him for he knew it was not that easy.

Furthermore, it can also be noticed that the pain that the narrator felt is directly insinuated in the poem in this stanza: "The hand that held my wrist / Was battered on one knuckle; / At every step you missed / My right ear scraped a buckle" (Roethke 30). Nonetheless, the contrasting emotions of the narrator's enjoyment were implicit. Instead, the emotions were portrayed through the words that the author has chosen to describe the situation. According to Edward Byrne, a writer and English professor in Valparaiso University, "the poet refers to his father as 'papa', connoting greater affection.

Additionally, the word choice of 'romp' reflects a more playful tone" (Byrne). Considerably, Roethke made use of words which portray affection and delight towards the father; therefore, the poem consists of two different emotions and at the same time correlates them with each other. The contrasting emotions become related because the narrator insinuates that he is able to endure the pain as long as his father plays with him. The poet may not have directly expressed the enjoyment that he felt, but by understating it through his use of words, he was able to show his happiness with his father in spite of the pain.