

Depictions of childhood emotion in "half-past two" and "piano"



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The following essay will explore how recollections of childhood are presented in “ Half-past Two”, by U. A. Fanthorpe, a poem through which a child talks about their experience of getting a detention and not knowing why, and not quite being able to comprehend the time fully. The essay will also focus on “ Piano”, by D. H. Lawrence, a poem through which a nostalgic man who misses his mother and longs for the sound of her playing the piano again. Both poems present childhood memories as unsettling, yet the clear negative tone assumed by Fanthorpe contrasts with the positive yearning expressed in Lawrence’s composition.

Firstly, in “ Half-past Two”, the boy’s experiences of not being able to read the time are stressed. He seems to know what happens at certain times of the day, for example “ Gettinguptime” and “ Timetogohomenowtime”, however he cannot quite understand the meaning of “ half-past two”. This neologism implies that he knows these times well and fluently, as they are not something he ever had to work out for himself, so they just seem like one thing. Furthermore, although he seems to know what a clock looks like- “ He knew the cock face”, he “ couldn’t click its language”. This personification shows that he is immature and it creates a visual image of what something which he cannot understand, which gives the poem a tone of frustration. This is similar to Lawrence’s “ Piano”, in that his persona too is bothered and affected by his childhood. In “ Piano”, the man is talking about how he wishes to go back to when he was a child and hear his mother sing, however in his poem, it could be seen as a positive thing to look back of from one viewpoint, which contrasts with “ half-past two”, when it is something annoying which the child could not get their head around. However, in “

Piano", when the man says " my manhood is cast", it shows that on the other hand, he could have erectile dysfunction, as his mother has destroyed his adult life.

In " Half-past Two", the poem follows a continuous pattern and each of the eleven stanzas consists three lines, three triplets. This links in with the strictness of the teacher who is addressed as " She", with a capital " S", showing that she is like royalty or something ethereal, so it is therefore crucial to obey her. Perhaps this is also why " He was too scared of being wicked to remind her.)" Also, the fact that this and "(I forgot what it was)", referring to the time, suggests that these are just thoughts that are not important and should be dismissed, as the most important thing to do is obey her. However, in " Piano", the last two stanzas out of three are quatrains, which contrasts to the first paragraph which consists of six lines due to its use of enjambment. Perhaps this is to emphasise the slow rhythm and movement of the poem, whilst " half-past two" is strict and has a stressful rhythm. The enjambment slows the pace down even more and the uses of the words " strings" and " sings" are sibilance, which gives the poem a soft and gentle tone. Furthermore, " Piano" also consists of rhyming couplets throughout, where as " Half-past Two" does not, which further emphasises its lilting tone that is full of wonder.

Moreover, in " Piano", D. H. Lawrence uses both metaphors and similes to express his tears and crying. For example " Down the flood of remembrance, I weep like a child". This suggests both his childish nature, and his inability to hold back his tears, which links in with the use of onomatopoeia to describe the piano- " burst into clamour/With the great black piano appassionato", as <https://assignbuster.com/depictions-of-childhood-emotion-in-half-past-two-and-piano/>

they both describe some dramatic happening and the word “burst” could be used to describe someone crying. This shows that him and his mother's piano playing had a strong connection and are similar, which is perhaps why he is so desperate to revisit this moment. Furthermore, the word “black” has connotations with danger and something mysterious, like the dark, which suggests that he perhaps is disturbed by his illness and the fact that wishes to be in a relationship with his mother that his father ruined. This is further implied through the use of pathetic fallacy- “winter outside”. This sense of not being able to understand somebody is similar to what we hear about in “Half-past Two”. It is further implied through the image in the final stanza of the boy “escaping into the clockless land forever/Where time hides tick-less waiting to be born”. This idea of being re-born further shows that Fanthorpe sees something wrong in the child and does not know what to do about it, just like how the man sees himself in “Piano”. Furthermore, the childish language and creation of a new word in “half-past two” when Fanthorpe talks about “the clockless land”, suggests that the boy was a mistake, as he does not deserve to be in the normal world with the rest of us.

The childhood in “Piano” is presented as something which the man wants to revisit, and D. H. Lawrence emphasises this through the nostalgic tone of his language. On the other hand, in “Half-past Two”, the childhood is seen more as a bad memory, as the child did something “Very Wrong”. However, the two poems are similar in the way in which they discuss childhood memories which are disturbing and have large impacts on the main characters involved.