

# My papa's waltz personal analysis



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Introduction: For this paper, you will be able to encounter the various meanings, tones, structure, my personal opinion and analysis of the poem “My Papa’s Waltz” by Theodore Roethke. For more to add, you will also encounter with a brief biography of the poet Roethke which will explain why the poet wrote this poem and how much meaning it has for him.

The reason why I chose this poem out of the other seven choices that were given was because this poem captivated me. The poem itself has a lot of parts in which it amazed me, but what amazed me the most was of how the poet could give two opposite actions, feelings and emotions; that ambiguity all at the same time. 1 Essay: “My Papa’s Waltz” was first written in 1942 by Theodore Roethke. It centers in the idea of the relationship between a father and a son.

Theodore Roethke was born in Saginaw, Michigan, in which he spent much of his childhood in the greenhouse –enlarging his love towards nature– where his father and uncle worked in. Roethke had a harsh childhood, which can be portrayed in many of his poems, as his father and uncle died at an early age. Maybe it was these harsh moments that depict the reason why Roethke’s

poems are so confusing and hard to know what he wants to say. " My Papa's Waltz" is an iambic trimeter with an ABAB rhyme. It consists of 4 stanzas, each stanza having 4 lines, also called a quatrain.

It is iambic because according to the shmoop page, one unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed one(1). Also, it is a trimeter because it has three stressed syllables. Relating to the tone, it can be seen first as violent but when looked deeply, it has a lovely, amiable and cheerful tone. Last but not least, it is a poem considered to depict connotation as it gives the association of a secondary meaning of a word or expression(2). Related to the analysis of the poem, Roethke is describing about one of his few memories he had with his father before he passed out.

It kind of leads you at first to believe that the father is abusing and mistreating him but when you reach to the end of the poem, you end up realizing that they were having a great time together. As Roethke is famous for being ambiguous in his writings, I will first talk about the dark and violent side and then the lovely and amiable side which can be perceived by the reader; but will clarify which side I'm taking at the final stanza. In the first stanza, it can be perceived as something violent right away by seeing the words " dizzy", and " death".

These are strong vocabulary and the voice of the boy seems kind of scared. In contrast, it could have meant that the father just had a few sips of whiskey and because the boy was still a child, just a small amount of alcohol could have made him dizzy. Also, by saying that he ' hung on like death' could be that as he didn't share too 2 saying that he ' hung on like death' could be that as he didn't share too much time with his dad, he held on to his father

very strong as he enjoyed it. In the second stanza, the violence gets worse as the utensils in the kitchen fall and the mother's face frowns of disapproval.

This can be the most direct evidence of violence in the whole poem. But, it can also show a positive side, for example they were having so much fun and delight that they created a mess in the kitchen and the mother was frowning because she had to clean all the mess up. Or, it could also have been that the mother was frowning in disbelief of how much fun the father and the son were having together. One last option of the mother frowning could be because she was jealous of not being part of the fun the father and son were having.

But most likely it would be the second reason, as it is the most reasonable one. In the third stanza, details of where the son had wounds and signs of beatings are described literally. A tone of suffering can be perceived from the tip of the nose, however as the poem gets to the end, the violence seems to cease. This is because Roethke here describes that his father actually held his wrist which is a sign of love. The knuckle of the father being battered just shows how hard the father worked with his bare hands and that even though the father must be tired of labor work, he still shares time with his son.

Also, when Roethke says 'ear scraped a buckle', he referred that as his height was small; his ear was just at the same level as of his father's hips where he had a buckle. So every time they loosed their rhythm of the waltzing, the boy was hit not on purpose but mistakenly or as an accident. Any fun activity has its risk or accident so a little bit of danger won't hurt

that much. In the fourth and last stanza, it is where the author Roethke shows what he has meant to say from the beginning of the poem.

The beating time of the head is that the father was measuring the tempo of the waltzing to his head as the boy was small and again the palm with dirt depicts the father's hard work. The act of that the father took the boy to his bed is simply an action of love, tenderness and warmth. Not any father would do that after a long day of work unless the father feels a deep connection and love towards his child. And by saying that Roethke kept grabbing to his father's shirt means that he didn't want to let go of his father.

This showed how much affection the boy had towards his dad and that all those actions that seemed violent were actually just fun to him. <sup>3</sup> From my personal view and analysis I've made, I stand and clarify that the poem is about an intimate moment Roethke had with his dad. The title alone states it because by using the word 'Papa', it refers to the father whom the child feels love, closeness and warmth. The word 'Waltz' is also used as a flow of calm music with rhythm for dancing. The title itself is remarkably positive and warm, meaning that the poem most likely is about the boy, Roethke describing one of his best moments with his father.

But also, after reading the poem several times -by several times I mean over a hundred times-, I came to this idea that maybe the waltz was the symbol or the description of how the relationship with his father was but this time METAPHORICALLY. By metaphorically I mean that maybe the waltz was the direct symbolic representation of the bond between Roethke and his father. To make myself clear, Roethke could have had a really bad relationship -as

the waltzing caused broken objects, parts of the body hurt and etc...- with his father but he still wanted to be with him -as when he still cling to his shirt-.

The entire poem could be a metaphor of how bad his relationship with his father was (because Roethke almost never had time to be with his father) but then even though it was bad, it didn't matter to him as he still loved his father. 4 Conclusion: In " My Papa's Waltz", Roethke highlighted the fondness, attachment and love towards his father in a manner only he could express. The use of these abstract ideas -in another words: connotation- were used because his love towards his father, the memories he had with his father were not simple and literal, but rather complex, deep and symbolical.

All in all, the most important thing is that Roethke leaves you as the reader a decision. This is why he is considered one of the best poets; no poet has given the reader a choice, a path or simply a decision. In this poem, Roethke gives you the decision to either take the poem from a negative side or from a positive side. It all depends on the reader, on how open-minded, understanding the reader is. This makes him unique, special and now, my favorite poet of all. 5 Bibliography: (1) <http://www.shmoop.com/my-papas-waltz/rhyme-form-meter.html> (2) <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/waltz?s=t> 6