

My papa waltz poem essay



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Quynh Nguyen Lynn Hovde English 101 February 17th, 2010 The Memory of the Waltz After reading the poem “ My Papa’s Waltz” by Theodore Roethke (807), I realized that there are many different opinions about this poem.

Some people think that this poem is about parental abuse, the other also think that it is about the happy memory of the relationship between father and son. In my point of view, the speaker in the poem is expressing his joyful time when he’s dancing with his father.

The whole poem is talking about the memory of the author about waltzing with his father when he was young. This poem has four stanzas and each stanza has four quatrains. In the first stanza, the speaker describes his drunken father by “ the whiskey on your breath/ Could make a small boy dizzy. ” They start dancing when the father gets back home from work. Even though the boy can’t follow his father beat, he still “ hung on like death” and won’t let go of his father hands.

We can see that the boy is having a very good relationship with his father, and he still feel happy when he’s dancing with his father who has a really strong whiskey breath, and always make the boy feel dizzy. The playful scene continues in the second stanza, and this time it moves to the kitchen. “ We romped until the pans/ Slid from the kitchen shelf. ” The father and the son keep dancing and moving in the kitchen until all the tools in the kitchen fall from the shelf to the floor. They make the mother feel unpleasant.

The mother doesn’t want them to dance in the kitchen, but she doesn’t stop them. In the third stanza, their waltz is continued by the father holding the son’s wrist on one knuckle, and if the father misses any step, his son will

scratch his ear into the buckle “ at every step you missed/ Mu right ear scraped a buckle”. Although the little boy hurts, he still doesn’t want to stop dancing and he still clings on to his father’s rough hands. By describing his father knuckle, we can see that the father is a hard working labor.

For the final stanza, they still continue dancing, and the father keep beating time on the boy head with his hand which get all dirty from his hard work to tell the boy that it is time for bed. The speaker once again tells us that his father is a hard worker through “ With a palm caked hard by dirt”. Despite a dirty hand, the boy still has a lot of fun with his father, and he doesn’t want to go to bed when his father put him on the bed “ Then waltzed me off to bed/ Still clinging to your shirt”. Throughout the poem, Roethke uses the concrete language which helps us imagining clearly the waltzing scene in our head.

We can see how annoying his mother is when he and his father dance in the kitchen “ my mother’s countenance/ Could not unfrown itself”, and see the little boy is trying so hard to keep the same beat with his father “ but I hung on like death:/ Such waltzing was not easy”. Besides seeing, we also can smell the strong alcohol from the father’s breath, or hear the pans are clattered in the kitchen “ We romped until the pans/ Slid from the kitchen shelf”. By using the concrete language, the reader can feel the happy family in this poem, and the author has had a very good memory about his father since he was young.

Because Roethke’s diction is normal and very simple, I can understand it after the second time I read it. The poem is following with iambic trimeter.

Because this poem is about the waltz dance, the rhythm in the poem is familiar with the waltz beat. The pattern of the rhyme in the poem jumps between the first and third lines and the second and fourth lines until the end of the poem. Using the stress on those words at the end of each quatrain like "breath and death", "knuckle and buckle" make the readers think that the boy is very joyful with his father.

Talking about waltz, we will think about some fancy place where all rich people gathering and dancing. However, in this poem, the waltz dance is not in any fancy place, and there aren't any rich people. There is only a little boy dancing with his father who has a whiskey breath, and dirty and rough hands. They're still having a lot of fun with each other. This is a poem of the love between the father and the son, and it's not a children abuse memory. It is about a good memory that the author has with his father when he was young.

In the conclusion, the poem is all about the happy childhood of the author. By using the syntax in the poem, it makes the readers also feel the love of the son toward his father, and how they enjoy their time together. I think this is a good poem because through this short poem, the author can tell the readers the whole playful scene that the author used to have with his father.

Work Cited Roethke, Theodore "My Papa's Waltz" Literature for Composition 8th ed. Sylvan Barnet, William Burto, William E. Cain. New York: Longman, 2007: 807. print