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**Poetry Explication Essay**

**Introduction**

When reading the poem “My Papa’s Waltz” written by Theodore Roethke, the interpretation of the poem can only be made on the basis of how the reader looks at it. I read the poem a couple of times to finally form my opinion. The poem can be perceived in both a negative as well as a positive context. Some people might look at this poem in a context of endless love amid a father and son, while others might perceive it in the perspective of parental abuse. When I read the poem all I could interpret from the title, symbolism, language and the tone was the love between a father and a son (Roethke, and Snodgrass). I could not see any signs of abuse or a traumatic experience that the main protagonist and narrator (the child) might have endured. This paper will discuss and analyze the poem “My Papa’s Waltz” and interpret the true meaning behind it.

**Discussion**

Let us start by shedding some light on who is the narrator of the story is; it is clearly the protagonist who is reminiscing the old times that they had spent with their father. The poem in a way is telling a story. Starting from the main title “My Papa’s Waltz,” the language used here projects that the narrator spent happy times as the waltz is a form of dancing. Dancing is usually associated with happiness and good times. “The whiskey on your breath,” the child talks about how his father is very drunk. “Could make a small boy dizzy,” the drunkard father apparently has a stench of alcohol coming from his mouth which is making him dizzy. Here the association of smell shows that even as the protagonist grew older they could still not forget that smell that came from their father’s mouth (Roethke, and Snodgrass). “But I hung on like death: Such waltzing was not easy,” these lines of the first stanza make it very clear that the child had such an emotional and loving bond with his father that he clung to him regardless of how difficult they found to waltz. It is evident that even though the child was not liking the smell coming from his father’s mouth but they did not want to miss a chance of spending time with him. The thing here to be kept in mind is that the child is aware of the fact that even though his father is drunk, he is still giving time to him.

"We romped until the pans, Slid from the kitchen shelf;" the protagonist further continues and talks about how they and their father kept on dancing throughout the house to the point the pans in the kitchen slipped as they bumped into them. This might be because of the father being very drunk and losing his balance. The poem further continues; My mother’s countenance, Could not unfrown itself.” This part states that the playful and non-serious attitude that the father is portraying is making the mother angry. Her expression says it all and she is not liking the fact that a mess is being created in the kitchen (Roethke, and Snodgrass). To me, the mother is mad because of the mess that the father is creating rather than waltzing the child.

“The hand that held my wrist, Was battered on one knuckle;" in this part of the poem, the antagonist is referring to his father's knuckle being injured. He notices it as they dance, which indicates that the father is a very hard working man and has gotten injured at work. "At every step you missed, My right ear scraped a buckle;” the poem continues and in a playful manner talks about how when the father misses a step the buckle on his clothes scraps the ear of the child. The mention of such words indicates the light part of the poem.

“You beat time on my head, With a palm caked hard by dirt, Then waltzed me off to bed Still clinging to your shirt." Looking at the last stanza of the poem the child mentions the father's palm cakes hard by dirt, in which he is acknowledging the fact that my father has been working very hard. This shows that the child has the realization of the fact of how much his father works for him. Lastly, it is said that the father waltz the child to bed and the child keeps on holding on to his shirt. To me, it shows that even after a hard day at work a father took the time to playfully put his child to bed regardless of being drunk (Roethke, and Snodgrass). As far as drinking is concerned, looking at the time when the poem was written, the drinking culture was very common. So, it cannot be associated with bad parenting. This poem tells a powerful and emotional story between a father and his son.

**Conclusion**

There are many contexts in which "My Papa's Waltz" can be taken in, but after thorough analysis and considering the time in which the poem was written, all I can see is a loving bond between a father and his child. A child never uses playful language, like a waltz, buckle, romped and so on if they feel afraid and insecure. The poem also shows how the mother only gets mad when the father and the child bump into the pans in the kitchen making them slip. The poem is a buffet of emotions and love through which the protagonist is trying to project his relation with his hardworking and loving father.

**Work Cited**

Roethke, Theodore, and William De Witt Snodgrass. *My papa's waltz*. Bluestem Press, College of Saint Benedict, 2001.