Your Name

Instructor Name

Course Number

Date

Title: Home and Family Themes in Literature

A literary theme can be defined as an idea or underlying meaning in a piece of text which the author or writer explores in their literary work. These themes hidden in stories, plays, novels, and poems are conveyed through characterization, setting, plot, dialogues. It is in fact, an amalgamation of these elements. Literary themes also explore human nature and hence multiple books or pieces of literature explore the same ideas. Among other themes of love, good vs. evil, revenge, courage and redemption, themes of family, home, and parental relationships have also been explored by different authors and poets. This paper seeks to explore the theme of home and family in three pieces of text selected from the chapter.

The first poem, "My Papa's Waltz" is written by Theodore Roethke; it appears to be very simple but explores deeper meanings of the theme of family and parental issues, employing effective literary devices and techniques. The poem was written in the 1940s and holds the status of one of the classical works by the author. The poem revolves around the moment shared in the life of a family where the father and son are romping around while the mother keeps an eye on them. There is a mixed feeling of fear and love. At one moment, the poem shares the lighter moments of family life, alongside he also shared how the drunk father is threatening the home life. There exists love and hardship and the relationship between father and son is somewhat confused. It looks like a happy family but sad at the same time, torn apart due to alcohol abuse. Also, the mother’s expression reveals there is a tension between the father and her, “My mother's countenance / Could not unfrown itself”; the domestic scene presented is a bit messy (Roethke). The father, a hard worker wants to have some moments of fun with his son, however, the mother is angry and disgruntled. It is assumed by many that the poem is inspired by the childhood moments from the author’s life.

“Those Winter Sundays” is a poem by Robert Hayden and it shares the memory of childhood. The speaker is recalling the action of his father on Sundays and re-captures some moments from family life. At its heart, the key theme in the poem is familial love between a father and son. It is love that makes the father wake up early in the morning on the weekend despite him being exhausted from a long hefty week of work. The title reveals that the father wakes up early even when it’s “blueblack cold” outside and he has a day off from work just to provide for the family (Hayden). Sunday, that has always been the day of rest throughout Judeo-Christian history, is not the day of rest for the father. He is working selflessly and without expecting anything in return, “No one ever thanked him” (Hayden). Moreover, parental love is quiet and brave; there are no snuggles but little action to demonstrate it. The author is trying to convey the way homes are made with parental duty and sacrifice, but it takes years for the child to acknowledge this constant love. The poem also illustrates the father-son relationship. The last stanza of the poem is dedicated to the regret the speaker feels over his father’s efforts. Child’s ignorance is reflected in these lines, “What did I know, what did I know / of love's austere and lonely offices?” (Hayden). The key take away from the poem is to care about these selfless relationships before it is too late.

The third piece of text is “Mother to Son” by Langston Hughes, a famous American poet. The poem is basically an advice from a mother to her son concerning the adversities of life. Alongside telling the child about the challenges and hardships, she tells the child to keep going and have courage. A very important message in the poem is, ‘Life is not a crustal staircase’ rather it is tough and one has to keep climbing no matter what. Besides, the theme of family hardships and mother’s love and affection is also explored by the poet. The poem also reflects on the challenges faced by mothers; these challenges have been represented by “tacks” and “splinters” in the staircase (Hughes). At every step, she confronts something new. The missing board in the staircase discloses that she got no support from others and had to climb all alone. However, despite everything she had to go through, she went ahead. She had been to places where there was no light. She advises not to sit still or stop in between but to keep going. In the end, the speaker reiterates that despite life being very tough for her, she is “still climbin” (Hughes). It is also an outlook on the life of a homemaker as a representation of reality. A mother’s life is sometimes surrounded by misery but she knows the best ways of dealing with these hardships with her abilities and remains strong for her children. The same lessons of hope and courage are transferred to her son in the poem.

To sum up, these poems have deliberated the theme of home and family by demonstrating the life of parents and parental relationships. All these pieces are centered on one key element; homemakers put a lot of effort for children and risk their peace to protect their children. This is what acts as a binding force for the family. Though their efforts are not always regarded, they keep going to make their children successful.

**Works Cited:**

Hayden, Robert. “Those Winter Sundays.” *Every Shut Eye Ain’t Asleep*, 1940.

Hughes, Langston. “Mother to Son.” *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, 1994, p. 30.

Roethke, Theodore. *My Papa’s Waltz by Theodore Roethke | Poetry Foundation*. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43330/my-papas-waltz. Accessed 13 Jan. 2020.