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Close Reading on “My Papa’s Waltz”

**Introduction**

Parents are a great gift from God. Their love and compassion are irreplaceable and no one can love the children like a parent. Parent’s love is probably the purest emotion found in this world and nothing can take its place. Unfortunately, many people fail to realize it when their parents are alive or when they are with their parents. People also ignore this valuable emotion when they are youthful and think that their parents do not understand them but they regret this ignorance in later life.

English literature contains a number of elements and works in which the sacrifices and contributions of parents are highlighted. In these pieces of literature, poets, writers, and storytellers have tried to glorify their parents and appreciate them for the sacrifices that the made for these creative people in childhood. One prominent example of this kind of contribution in literature is the poem “My Papa’s Waltz” by Theodore Roethke. The poem was written in the 1940s and is set in some earlier decade of the 1900s (Roethke). Theodore Roethke is a modern American poet and believes in expressing the emotions and love for his father freely.

**Discussion**

“My Papa’s Waltz” is not a very long poem, in fact, it is a very short piece of poetry consisting of just four stanzas, but these four stanzas are full of life and convey a very deep meaning. It is also very simple and easy to read and there are no difficult terms used in it. The poet Theodore Roethke, has made its very simple and not used complex methods so that his emotions and feelings regarding the relationship with his dad can be conveyed in a clean manner.

If the literal meaning of the title of the poem is considered, the term “Waltz” refers to a type of dance that is performed triple times by the dancers. Usually it is performed by a couple who turn rhythmically round and round as they progress and move around the dance floor. This kind of dance involved interaction and interdependence, which means both the partners would not be able to carry on the steps or dance properly without the corporation of each other.

Coming towards the intricate meaning of the poem, “My Papa’s Waltz conveys a number of meanings. In fact, a poem doesn’t have a single reducible “meaning.” It can have a subject, a bunch of attitudes; it can convey a mood. Much of what it does is by connotation and metaphor, but a person cannot judge the mood of the poet exactly that what he was actually thinking while writing this piece of poetry. Poetry is actually meant to convey feelings, thoughts, and emotions of a person (the poet) to the readers. These emotions can be related to a current hot issue or about some past event that has already taken place. So the poets or writers try to make it as smooth as they can so that the meaning can be conveyed in an easy manner.

The poem “My Papa’s waltz” starts with the poet describing his father’s bad habit of drinking. He informs the readers that his father was a very heavy drinker and his breath smelled heavily of whiskey (Chang). Moreover, he recalls the sweet memories of his childhood when he and his father used to dance in the kitchen of their house. His father, despite being drunk, performed a waltz with his son in his arms. The poet recalls that he used to be clinging to his father’s shirt for dear life

In this poem, the narrator is describing dancing with his father, and he’s making it sound like a dangerous experience, of which his mother disapproves. Nonetheless, he is clinging to his father at the end when he is waltzed off to bed. Waltzes are supposed to be graceful, elegant dances, so there’s a built-in contrast between what a waltz is supposed to be, and what this waltz is. Notice that although the speaker is making it clear that the waltz is dangerous, a bit frightening, he doesn’t disapprove and that one line about his father’s battered finger could suggest sympathy.

Another meaning of the poem can be taken in terms of masculinity. The poem shows the supreme authority of the poet’s father in the house and shows that his father held a dominant position in the family. The poet’s mother did not like the way his father used to carry and handle her child but she could not do anything except frown. Maybe she felt uncomfortable due to the fact that his father used to disturb the order in the kitchen or the way he used to carry her little baby. The sweetest part of the poem comes in the end (in the last stanza) where the poet remembers that his father used to take him to his bedroom and put him to bed, still dancing, while the poet used to still cling to his shirt very tightly (Nasir).

**Conclusion**

In a nutshell, it can be seen that the poet Theodore Roethke values his father very much, which can also be seen through his expressions in the poem “My Papa’s Waltz”. He cherishes the memories he had with his father at a young age and wishes he could bring that time back. The poem presents a mixture of emotions, but still, the main theme of this poem is the conveyance of the overflowing love of a son towards his father.

Works Cited

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