
Theme Of Abuse In My Papa's Waltz By Theodore Roethke

There is a variety of abuse that takes place around the world, such as mental, physical, and verbal abuse. However, between 960,000 and 3,000,000 incidents of domestic violence are reported each year, while many other incidents go unreported. It's estimated that more than ten million people experience domestic violence in the U.S each year. In Theodore Roethke's "My Papa's Waltz", the author tries to embellish the horrid experience of abusing his son into a joyful and loving session of a waltz. Waltz is a dance involving interaction, rhythm, and interdependence between two people, thus symbolizing a relationship between the father and the son. However, in reality, the waltz actually symbolizes a beating, the word choice throughout the poem often indicates the beating that takes place. The poem is led by the dancing around the house with his son, while the beating takes place. In Roethke's "My Papa's Waltz" the author uses the form of "dance" to depict an abusive relationship towards his son.

The poem states "At every step you missed, my right ear scraped a buckle", which can be interpreted as an innocent dance between a child and his drunk father. However, this stanza can actually be understood that the "dance" isn't all fun and games for the boy, as he's getting pretty scratched up. The boy is scared of upsetting his father, which is why he still insists on continuing to dance with his tipsy father despite his father constantly hurting him. In the early 20th century, it was common for a father to discipline his kids by beating them with a belt. Punishment like that isn't explicitly shown in this poem, but the same belt could've been used to discipline the boy as well.

The Battered Children Syndrome was a big issue during the 1940s-1950s, in which many children suffered from a set of symptoms, injuries, and signs of mistreatment seen on severely or repeatedly abused children. During this time period, it was common for children to get abused by their fathers or male relatives due to the massive amount of power men held in their homes and society. Battered children' or 'non-accidental injury' had been identified by pediatricians from the 1950s. It became a major policy issue of the 1960s and 70s, though more associated with the actions of mothers than fathers or other male relatives. So, child abuse was a massive issue during the 1940s-1950s, which explains how the father's behavior might be a norm for the child and even the mother. In the poem, it indicates how the mother/wife was not happy, due to the mess her husband was making in the kitchen but kept silent out of fear and submission.

In the third stanza, the speaker illustrates how his father manhandles him throughout the dance. "The hand that held my wrists/was battered on one knuckle", these lines show the roughness and severeness of his father's grip on his wrist instead of a steady and rhythmic posture that customary partners should. The father's battered knuckle symbolizes the effect of the beating

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that takes place and the aggression that Roethke's father has towards the child. The interpretation in stanza four also allows us to sense the indication of the beating, "You beat time on my head/with a palm caked hard by dirt", in which we see more of the father's roughness during this "waltz". The word "beat" has a negative connotation, which refers to the beating of the child because you can "keep" time more than you can beat to it, but "beat" has a more pessimistic undertone. Throughout the poem, Roethke's leaves us to interpret the poem as a memory of his terrible childhood.

The poem follows a simple ABAB rhyme scheme, which means that it follows a classic five-beat pattern of rhythm. The poem has such an upbeat and joyful beat that it disguises the horrid truth. The horrid truth of a little innocent boy who takes a look back at a domestic part of his childhood where his drunkard of a father consistently abuses him. The speaker uses words and phrases like "romped" and "I hung on like death" that secretly indicate the domestic violence and sense of fear that the child partakes in throughout the poem. For example, when the speaker states "Such waltzing was not easy", it specifies how the roughness of the "waltz" was so violent that the pots and pans begin to fall to the floor in the kitchen. The series of imagery used to communicate the themes and the overall context of the play was very beneficial. Many of the images conveyed theme of power, violence, and dominance.

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