

Brett Fonder
English 102
Song Analysis

Neglect

Cat's in the Cradle was written by Harry Chapin in 1974 on his album Verities & Balderdash. Cat's in the Cradle has a very soothing beat with great acoustics. The song tells a very tragic story, but until the lyrics are seen on paper the listener never really grasps the concept of the song. The chorus seems very catchy and makes the song sound somewhat happy. Cat's in the Cradle is about a son trying to grab the attention of his father who is a businessman with little time for his son.

The first verse of the song starts off with the father saying:

My child arrived just the other day,
He came to the world in the usual way.
But there were planes to catch, and bills to pay.
He learned to walk while I was away.
And he was talking 'fore I knew it, and as he grew,
He'd say, "I'm gonna be like you, dad.
You know I'm gonna be like you."

These words describe a son who was born into a world without his father being around very much. His father could have even missed his actual birth. The father seems to prioritize business over family and personal life. The father believes that he is contributing to the family by making the money as opposed to being there for support. Babies take several months to walk and in some cases a year, so obviously the father is gone a great deal if the son learned to walk while he was gone. The last two lines of the

verse talking about how the son wants to be like his father when he grows up are typical of all sons growing up. Fathers are viewed as heroes and can do nothing wrong.

The second verse of the song contains the words:

My son turned ten just the other day.
He said, "Thanks for the ball, dad, come on let's play.
Can you teach me to throw?" I said, "Not today,
I got a lot to do." He said, "That's ok."
And he walked away, but his smile never dimmed,
Said, "I'm gonna be like him, yeah.
You know I'm gonna be like him."

The second verse continues to show how the father thinks material items will make up for his lack of presence. The father is so engulfed in his work that he does not have even a few minutes to play catch with his son. Every good father has time for that. The son continues to accept that his father is busy and still loves him deeply. The way his father acts is beginning to seem normal to him. The son just smiles and goes on with his life and still wants to be like his father when he grows up.

The third verse of the song contains the words:

Well, he came from college just the other day,
So much like a man I just had to say,
"Son, I'm proud of you. Can you sit for awhile?"
He shook his head, and he said with a smile,
"What I'd really like, dad is to borrow the car keys.
See you later. Can I have them please?"

The son has finally grown up and to the father's dismay the son has no time for his father. The son's action seems very similar to the father's actions while he was growing up. The son has been gone away at school for awhile and all he wants to do when he gets home is go out and take a drive. Every time the father got back from a business trip all he wanted to do was sit around and relax. The son adapted to that and found that to be a normal father and son relationship.

In the final verse the father says:

I've long since retired and my son's moved away.

I called him up just the other day.

I said, "I'd like to see you if you don't mind."

He said, "I'd love to, dad, if I could find the time.

You see, my new job's a hassle, and the kid's got the flu,

But it's sure nice talking to you, dad.

It's been sure nice talking to you."

And as I hung up the phone, it occurred to me, He'd grown up just like me.

My boy was just like me.

The final verse is very sad because it shows that the old saying like father like son is very true. The son turned out just like his father was and now he has no time for him. The son seems to let business be his top priority. The father finally realizes how he messed up in raising his son. The song makes it very obvious that the father regrets what he did and how he wishes he could start all over.

The chorus is a bit tricky, but if it is looked into deeply it can be understood. The chorus says:

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon,
Little boy blue and the man in the moon.
"When you coming home, dad?" I don't know when,
But we'll get together then.
You know we'll have a good time then."

The cat in the cradle has significance because cats have been known to suffocate babies if they get in their cradles. They sprawl across the baby and the baby can no longer move. Someone with a silver spoon is said to be full of wealth and riches. The son is being suffocated by his father's riches because he isn't there to provide love and support. The father spoils the son with the material things. The line about little boy blue and the man in the moon shows how the son is sad about his father being gone and how the father is like a distant, fictional character. The final three lines about when the son will finally see his father shows how the father just says this to get the son off his back. The father has no intentions of seeing his son, but he makes him believe that he does.

Cat's in the cradle is a very deep song with a significant meaning. Hopefully anyone who listens to this song would understand the meaning and make sure that they never raise a child like this. Harry Chapin expresses a common problem in today's society and tries to make it noticeable for those who are guilty of this crime: Neglect.

The lyrics to the song can be found at:

<http://www.littlejason.com/chapin/songs/catcrad.html>

