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English 102

### Cats in the Cradle

Father-son relationships are unique and special. The affection and attention that a father shows his son is everlasting. A boy learns to be a man from his father and when the father is gone from home, the boy will act just like his father when he is older. The song "Cats in the Cradle" by Harry Chapin shows how a father was never at home because he was always working, thus neglecting his son. His son grows up learning about life through his father's actions and eventually neglects his father the same way the father neglected him as a child. The lyrics in "Cats in the Cradle" reflect the relationship of a boy and a father who is never around through poetic imagery.

The lyrics in "Cats in the Cradle" describe how his son was born "in the usual way". Then Chapin says, "But there were planes to catch, and bills to pay," and while the father was gone, the child "learned to walk" and "was talking 'fore I knew it." The father is working so much that he is missing out on his child's life. The child then says, "I'm gonna be like you dad. You know I'm gonna be like you."

In the third stanza, Chapin shows the boy growing older and says, "My son turned ten just the other day." The boy says, "Thanks for the ball, dad, come on let's play. Can you teach me to throw?" His dad replies back, "Not today, I got a lot to do." The son "walked away but his smile never dimmed" which suggests that the boy is proud of his dad and then says, "I'm gonna be like him, yeah. You know I'm gonna be like him."

In the fifth stanza, Chapin describes his son, who is now a man, and says "Well he came from college just the other day." The father then asks the son, "Can you sit for a while?" His son "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?"

In the seventh stanza, Chapin says, "I've long since retired and my son's moved away. I called him up just the other day." Chapin then says, "I'd like to see you if you don't mind." His grown-up son then replies, "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 its sure nice talking to you." At the end of the song, the last lines are, "He'd grown up just like me. My boy was just like me."

In-between these odd numbered stanzas is a refrain that repeats after each stage of the son's life: "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 meaning of the song is that a boy has a father in his life, but his father is never around. The boy just wants his father's attention. But as they are getting older and the boy wants his dad to "teach me to throw," the father is too busy with work to give his son any of his time. And when the son would ask, "When you coming home, dad?" the father would make excuses and respond with, "I don't know when, But we'll get together then. You know we'll have a good time then." The son says throughout the song, "I'm gonna be like you, dad. You know I'm gonna be like you." At the end of the song he is, in fact, just like his father. When the father is retired and finally has the time, he calls up his son on the phone, but his son is too busy with his own life. Then the father realizes "He'd grown up just like me. My boy was just like me." This last stanza also echoes the son's childhood wishes when the father says, "When you coming

home, son?" But like his father's excuses, the son says, "I don't know when, but we'll get together then dad. You know we'll have a good time then." The song shows how children are a product of their environment and they imitate what they see, especially from their parents.

The figurative meaning of the song is that an absent father is a learned behavior that occurs in cycles, just like the refrain. The father was probably never around because his father was not around, and now the son has learned the same behavior. Also, this song shows that life is too short to neglect your children. In the refrain, "And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon, Little boy blue and the man in the moon," the son's youth is summarized. "The cat's in the cradle" is the boy who has outgrown the cradle and now the cat is in it. The words "silver spoon" is suggesting that the boy is from a wealthy family and the words "little boy blue" can either refer to the childhood poem that was read to him when he was young or it can mean that the boy is sad and gloomy because his father is never around. The phrase "the man in the moon" refers to the absent father who might as well be on the moon because he is never at home. The figurative meaning of the song is that the boy grew up fast in a wealthy family and his father is never home, which makes his son feel miserable.

There are many poetic elements in the song that enhance the figurative meaning. The refrain is repeated every other stanza. The chorus is also catchy and it rhymes. Chapin uses the word "arrives" to show his son being born. Children do not arrive into the world; trains and planes arrive. But the use of the word "arrive" instead of the word "born" suggests that the father is referring to his son as a business. Chapin uses imagery to show how a boy waits for his father to play, but there is never any time in the day. There are also plenty of transportation images such as walking, planes, and car keys. Transportation is supposed to make things faster but in the end, all those advances do not matter when you do not have the ones you love.

Furthermore, the song covers a long period of time, perhaps 30 years, and it shows how the son grew up to be just like his father.

The theme of the song is to give one's children attention and love. If a father is only giving them their basic needs such as food and water, they will be lacking emotional needs. Children are like sponges and absorb what they learn and see from their parents, good or bad. The significance of the song is to make the listener understand that children need more than material possessions in life, and to spend time with them or when they get older they will be just like their parents were to them.

The song "Cats in the Cradle" shows how a boy was neglected by his father, and in return neglects his father when he grows up. The song stresses situations that many children are in, whether or not their father lives with them. Chapin does all this by intensifying the effects of a father who provides financially, but not emotionally for his son. The song reminds the listener to not let life pass one by. If a father spends all his time away at work and not with his children, they will emulate their father's actions. "Cats in the Cradle" teaches that children need their parents' love and affection and illustrates what happens if they do not receive this.