

Mikey Duro

Professor Sharon Bell

Poetry Essay

English 2, 2000

### Skeletons in the Closet

Eminem may be known as the Rap God, but the truth is that he is a son with a mother and a very troubled past. Eminem has long talked about his familial issues that have obviously shaped his world. His father that left him and his mother as a baby can often receive some pretty harsh criticism in his work. In his song, “Cleaning Out My Closet”, Eminem offers an unapologetic and raw reflection of his tumultuous relationship with his mother. This song brings out a lot of emotion that really shows how angry he was with his mother. It also acts as a method of catharsis that allows him to express himself and try to heal the damage of the emotional scars his mother left him. The defiance that is on display in the opening verses of the song sets up the listeners mindset to be that of an angry teenager. As the song progresses it introduces the shameful mother and the petulant child she is raising. “Cleaning Out My Closet” utilizes raw and personal lyrics to address the troubled past with his mother, offering a glimpse of an angry and ungrateful son, and a trip down memory lane to see the kind of mother that raised him to be that way.

Eminem delves into the complicated relationship with his mother by using some searing commentary about what he thought of her and how she has hurt him. The lyrics portray Eminem’s haunted childhood, detailing stories about neglect and substance abuse. He talks about witnessing his mother popping pills in the kitchen, or screaming at him and blaming him when things would go missing. The often coarse language he uses to describe her behavior shows the

toxic image he saw when thinking about his own mother. The emotional baggage that he has carried with him and the bitterness he feels toward her defines their relationship. The title of the song itself, “Cleaning Out My Closet” refers to airing out your dirty laundry in a public manner. Eminem bravely describes how his mother was a drug addict, and the damaging ways she would use her child to score a fix. Munchausen syndrome, a condition that led her to fake illnesses for her son and herself was an example of how she used her son. This kind of behavior led to some serious trauma for Eminem that has stayed with him into his adult life. All a child really wants is a stable home and to feel loved by their parents. “Cleaning Out My Closet” captures Eminem’s lingering animosity and attempts to break himself free of the shackles of his childhood, redefining himself beyond the mold that his mother set for him.

The way Eminem berates his mother and tries to humiliate her in such a public way shows how angry and hurt he must feel. It also shows an immature and ungrateful son that does not appreciate what a single mother goes through. With the lines of the chorus stating that he never means to hurt his mother, Eminem is sarcastically illustrating the emotional rift between him and his mother. Whether or not everything Eminem says about his mother is true, he unleashes a tirade of public shaming and profane language toward the woman who gave him life and raised him to adulthood. This song is in part a retribution to a recording that his mother released, admonishing him for his betrayal, and refuting many of his past assertions about her. This shows that there are always two sides to any story. The depth of his words in this song and the resentment that it shows he carries reflects the emotional wounds that were inflicted by his upbringing. However, there are no lyrics pertaining to anything that his mother could have been going through. A single mother trying to raise children can be a very daunting task that no child has the ability to comprehend. The lyrics in the song reflect how a young boy saw his mother

struggle through life. Since the song has been released Eminem has made efforts to reconcile with his mother and even stated that he no longer performs or listens to “Cleaning Out My Closet”. This shows that as he matured, grew up, and raised a child of his own, he was able to see his mother in a different light.

With all of the hurt and pain that Eminem showcases throughout “Cleaning Out My Closet”, he walks the listener through his childhood and shows them the awful things his mother did to make him so bitter and angry. It seems to be very important to Eminem that the world understands why he is so hurt and angry. With all of the vicious lyrics that are in this song, as well as many other songs of his, he needs to feel understood and seen. Between the drug abuse, the verbal and psychological abuse, and the abuse of trust he witnessed and perceived from his mother, Eminem is desperate to alleviate himself from the hurt and pain he feels. Through all of this pain, he has created a persona for himself as the haunted and damaged rapper that is going to show the world that he’s become a good man in spite of it all. By making his mother the villain of his life, it also takes away any responsibility he has for any of his own perceived shortcomings. Eminem’s harsh and unforgiving portrayal of his mother actually seems to reveal a woman that is trapped within her own demons. This perspective is crucial to better understand the relationship between Eminem and his mother. The family dynamic developed into a situation that seemed to become destructive to everyone involved. A mother who was left to raise a child on her own can run into many hardships. Eminem’s mother was struggling with her own issues, making it difficult for her to be a good mother and show her son the love and care he deserved. “Cleaning Out My Closet” displays how his mother’s behavior was the driving force behind his anger and resentment, and has shaped him into the person he has become.

The unflinching and poignant telling of Eminem's difficult relationship with his mother pushes him to his emotional limit. The song explores the psychological and emotional repercussions of his troubled past, while casting the blame mostly on his mother. The insight into his mother as a troubled young mother provides the listener with the environment in which he was raised. The vulnerability that Eminem displays is used to cast him as the hero of his own life story and his mother as the villain. Above all, "Cleaning Out My Closet" serves as testimony to the lasting effects that a toxic family dynamic can have on someone's psyche and outlook on life.