

Commentary on sylvia plath's "ariel"



**ASSIGN
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"Ariel", a poem written by Sylvia Plath, describes the narrator's transition from a state of complete stillness to a state of rapid movement whilst she is riding a horse into the dawn.

Throughout this poem, Plath conveys a sense of freedom both in the physical and mental state through the use of natural imagery and metaphorical references. However, an undertone of tension and fear is accentuated through her use of diction. The theme of physical freedom is highlighted in the opening stanzas of the poem. The use of the word "lioness" recreates the image of power and complete freedom to roam without restriction.

In addition, the use of the word "God", further stresses the sense of unlimited power and independence. In the opening stanza of the poem, the image of darkness and stillness is described in the phrase "stasis in darkness". The use of the imagery of darkness reiterates the sense of a lack of limitation, as the scene described is a "pour of tor and distances".

However, the rider also experiences mental freedom as depicted through the phrase "as one we grow" showing that she is becoming more at one with nature.

This is further emphasized through Plath's use of the word "sister". Plath describes the rider as "sister to the brown arc of the neck". The word "sister" gives an impression that she is becoming much more comfortable and secure with the horse she is riding upon, hence, uniting with it to become one. The rider also experiences a release of control as she is "haul[ed] through air – thighs, hair; Flakes from [her] knees". The use of

synecdoche dehumanizes the rider, further emphasizing her unity with her surroundings.

Furthermore, towards the end of the poem, the rider “ foam[s] to wheat, a glitter of seas”. Again, the rider is reducing herself to become a part of nature. The rider gains a sense of mental freedom as it is dispersed into the surroundings and she becomes much more comfortable with the way she is. Towards the end, the rider develops a sense of comfort and unpeels herself from all of the “ stringencies” that hold her down. Plath also develops an increase in the rhythm of the poem as compared to the opening stanzas. The phrases “ pivot of heels and knees” and “ splits and passes” generate a quick rush of actions that occur in the poem.

Plath also incorporates the image of an arrow that is sharp and piercing. This epitomizes the sense of a quick directed release into nature. Despite the comfort gained from the sense of freedom, tension is raised through the use of dark and deathlike imagery. The opening stanza is set in an image of darkness. Although this gives a sense of freedom and a lack of limitation, it creates a ghostly atmosphere as dawn is a particularly eerie time of the day when there is utmost silence all around.

The word “ substanceless” carries with it a connotation of emptiness, bringing about a more ghostlike atmosphere. The phrase “ Nigger-eye berries cast dark hooks” also carries a very dreary image. The color depicted is dark and gloomy with a blood-red shade. The word “ hook” is often related with sharp and painful objects, thus, creating a sense of pain and sinister actions.

Consequently, the imagery created by the phrase "Black sweet blood mouthfuls" is harsh, eerie and uncomfortable. The contrast between sweet and blood emphasizes the disturbing eeriness felt from the poem. Plath's use of deathlike imagery as depicted in the phrase "dead hand, dead stringencies" destroys the sense of comfort that is depicted through the rider's gain of freedom. Furthermore, Plath incorporates a child's cry into the poem which reiterates the discomfort and eeriness of this poem as described in the phrase "The child's cry melts in the wall". This depicts an image of a child's cry slowly and painfully melting and blending into the surrounding. Plath's structure and rhythm of the poem is extremely influential to the atmosphere and tone throughout.

The poem is written in short stanzas to present a quick pace in the rhythm of the poem. An increase in rhythm can be seen throughout the poem. The opening stanzas consist of polysyllabic words which attribute to the pace of the poem. Words such as "darkness" and "substanceless", consists of the vowel "a" that is elongated in this context. The phrase "pour of tor" creates a lyrical rhythm to it, extending the pace of the beginning. Towards the end of the poem, the length of each line because much shorter and the monosyllabic words chosen give a much more rapid pace to the poem.

Words such as "flies" and "eye", consist of the vowel sound of "i" which is much more short and quick, creating an increase in rhythm. Through the intricate portrayal of a rider upon a horse, riding towards the dawn, Plath has also revealed the idea of a positive mental and physical release along with an atmosphere of dark and deathlike imagery. These two conflicting images

create a sense of eeriness that evidently runs throughout the poem, creating suspense and intrigue for the reader.