

# 'the arrival of the bee box' by sylvia plath



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

'The Arrival of the Bee Box' was written by Sylvia Plath after the end of the Second World War. The poem is about the arrival of a bee box, and the emotions that Plath has towards it, and the sounds emanating from it. The poem has a definite beginning, middle, and end, but has no logical sense of progression.

Plath's stream of consciousness may be responsible for this. The poem is written in the first person, and is about someone who orders a wooden box that contains bees. Plath uses very unconventional language to describe the way the box looks to her. She may have used this unconventional language to describe the bee box, as the poem may not actually be a literal description of a bee box, but could be a metaphor for something else. An example of the unconventional language that she uses to describe the box is shown from the following quotation: 'Square as a chair and almost too heavy to lift. I would say it was the coffin of a midget Or a square baby Were there not such a din in it.

' In the first stanza, she describes the box as being a midget's coffin, or a coffin of a square baby, which are two very puzzling thoughts, which make the reader think hard about what Plath is actually trying to say. She also describes the box as being problematic, as she says that it is 'almost too heavy to lift'. This could mean that the box actually is a real bee box, and is too heavy to lift in real life, or the sheer weight of the box could represent something completely different, such a serious problem that is frustrating her mind. The 'din' that is described within the box could be interpreted in two ways. The first way could literally be the sound of a swarm of bees that are in the box, and the second way is that the 'din' could represent the

thoughts in her head. That particular word could have been used to describe the sound that was generated from within the box, as a 'din' is usually thought of as being an unpleasant noise, and the thoughts inside of her mind could be just that.

In the second stanza, Plath talks of how attracted she is to the box, as it is home to a hidden danger. Plath describes that the box is 'locked', which shows that whatever inside must be frightening, or dangerous in some way. The box being locked, and her attraction to seeing what is in it could have Biblical references. In the Bible, Adam is drawn into eating the forbidden fruit, which meant that he was cast out of the Garden of Eden. The fact that the fruit was forbidden made it more tempting for him to eat it, as there must have been something special about it. The locked box could be interpreted in the same way, as the fact that you can't see what's in there compels Plath into investigating it.

This obsessive compulsion is shown clearly in the following quotation: 'The box is locked, it is dangerous. I have to live with it overnight And I can't keep away from it. There are no windows, so I can't see what is in there. There is only a little grid, no exit.' She describes the box as being 'dangerous', and then says that she'll have to 'live with it overnight' shows that she is either frightened of the bees, or that she fears her own mind to such an extent, that she is scared to go to sleep.

She also describes that fact that there is 'no exit' from the box, which could mean that her thoughts are trapped in her head, and that she can't escape the constant wave of thoughts that are plaguing her head. In the next

stanza, she talks about how she tries to see what the inside of the box looks like, but she can't as it is too 'dark'. The darkness could mean that Plath had so many thoughts crawling through her mind, that she was unable to think properly. The darkness in her head is again described by her repetition of the words 'dark' and 'black'.

Again, Plath uses unpleasant, and quite shocking vocabulary to try and instigate some sort of reaction from the reader, as she describes the contents of the box as being almost lethal, as she uses the word 'swarmy'. This word makes the reader feel uncomfortable, and provokes thoughts of bees, infection, and disease, which are all rather disturbing. Examples of more disturbing, and thought-provoking vocabulary are shown in the following quotation: 'I put my eye to the grid. It's dark, dark, With the swarmy feeling of African hands Minute and shrunk for export, Black on black, angrily clambering.' Plath has used anthropomorphism to describe the bees that are trapped in the box, by using the words 'African' to describe their origin, and also the word 'clambering'. She may have used the word 'clambering' for two reasons.

The first reason could be that she was trying to literally describe what the bees in the box are trying to do, which is to escape from the box, but the other possible reason is that it could be her thoughts that are trying to escape from their prison, which is her mind. Plath then questions herself over how she can let them (the bees or her thoughts) out. In the fourth stanza, she talks of what it is about the bees that disgruntles her the most. This is the sound that the bees generate, and the sound of multiple wings flapping, all out of time with one another to give a long, constant drone. However, this

noise that she talks of could also just be a metaphor for the noise of the countless thoughts in her mind. In this stanza, she talks of how she can't understand what she is thinking, as she is being bombarded with all of these thoughts.

She talks of how all the bees in the box are individuals, but they all have some common aims, and act in a unit when necessary. The evidence for her conflicting thoughts are shown in the following quotation: 'How can I let them out? It is the noise that appals me most of all, The unintelligible syllables. It is like a Roman mob, Small, taken one by one, but my God, together!' The first line of the above quotation shows a sense of desperation from the poet, about how she can free herself from the thoughts that are overrunning her head, and from the distressing noise of these thoughts. From the last two lines of the above quotation, one can interpret that Plath may have described her thoughts as individually being harmless, and how she could deal with them one at a time, but could also describe how she cannot deal with the masses of thoughts that continuously linger in her head. In the fifth stanza, Plath describes how when she puts her head to the bee box, she hears the sound of 'furious Latin', which could again relate to the Bible.

In the Bible, Latin is seen to be the language that is spoken by evil, and is associated with the devil. Latin is also the language that is most commonly associated with ghosts, and other beings that are thought to be cruel. In this stanza, Plath tries to reassure herself that she is not 'Caesar', and that the Roman mob isn't actually after her. She also tries to reassure herself that she can send the bee box back if she wishes to. She tries to reassure herself

that she is in control of the situation, as she says that she can let them die, as she is the owner.

This could be interpreted as her literally being the owner of the bees, or her being the owner of her own thoughts. When she says that they can die, she may be referring to killing the bees, but I think that she is referring to killing her own thoughts, which would require her to kill herself. This gives a whole new meaning to the poem, as it could be interpreted as Plath writing about trying to commit suicide, which would make all the metaphors used in the poem thus far fit with this idea. The quotation below shows how she starts off by reaching breaking point, as she describes the noise as 'furious Latin' to reassuring herself that she is in control over her thoughts, and that she can release herself from them if she really wants to: 'I lay my ear to furious Latin. I am not Caesar. I have simply ordered a box of maniacs.

They can be sent back  
They can die, I need feed them nothing, I am the owner.'

The sixth stanza is a turning point in the poem, as before she didn't know how to escape from the noise of the bees (or her thoughts), and now she starts to consider what would be the consequence if she did. She begins to feel some guilt towards the bees (or her thoughts), which contrasts to the last line of stanza five, where she thought that she could do anything, as she was the owner. She starts to wonder what would happen if she set her thoughts free by committing suicide, and if they would remember her. For the first time in the poem, Plath uses very pleasant, feminine, and delicate imagery to describe what she would be like once she had set herself free.

The following quotation shows all this: 'I wonder how hungry they are. I wonder if they would forget me I just undid the locks and stood back and turned into a tree. There is the laburnum, its blond colonnades, And the petticoats of the cherry.' In the penultimate stanza, Plath again ponders what would happen if she set the bees (or her thoughts) free.

She wonders if the bees would remember her, as she goes on to describe a bee keeper's outfit in the second line of the stanza, calling it a 'moon suit and funeral veil'. She again reassures herself that if she set the bees free, then they would not harm her, as she is not a source of honey. The use of the words 'funeral veil' could again be a reference to this poem being about her committing suicide, and her constant reassurance could be the lapses in her thoughts about what she is about to do. In the last line of this stanza, she finally makes up her mind about what to do, and decides that she is going to set the bees free. She says that she will be 'sweet God', which could be interpreted as another reference to her trying to commit suicide, as it is God who is usually thought of as having the power to decide between life and death.

The following quotation shows this: 'Tomorrow I will be sweet God, I will set them free.' This shows that Plath has come a very long way in terms of a decision within the course of the poem. At the start of the poem, she was totally unsure of what to do, even though she was compelled towards letting her thoughts go. During the course of the poem, she considers what would happen if she did commit suicide, and if the world would actually miss her. In the end, she comes to a decision that her suicide is ultimately for the best, and decides that she will commit the act the next day.

The very last line of the poem leaves the reader with a thought of what happens after death. The line says 'The box is only temporary', which could refer to the human body just being something that holds your thoughts in for a period of time. she has finally made the decision that she is going to end her life to relieve herself from the noise of her thoughts. However, I think that Plath isn't actually totally sure that committing suicide is the right action to take, as the penultimate and ultimate lines of the poem, which overrun a stanza do not rhyme completely, which could show some of Plath's lingering doubts. I think that this poem definitely tells the reader more about the poet herself, then the actual subject matter of the poem. It is obvious that the poem is not actually about a bee box, as Plath's stream of consciousness, and her fluctuation between thoughts and emotions shows that she is expressing her uncensored personal thoughts directly onto the page.

Plath had a history of mental illness, and suffered much abuse during her lifetime, initially from her father, and then later from her husband. This poem is about the doubts that she had before she tried to commit suicide, but expressed using terminology that could also be interpreted as a literal description of a bee box. From this poem, the reader can see that Plath's mind was full of conflicting emotions, and that she was actually fighting an inner struggle against her suicidal feelings.