

# The leap

Education



Francisco Mata Mrs. Harschlip Eng 102 "The Leap" In James Dickey's poem "The Leap," he tells about his memory of a "thin/and muscular, wide-mouthed, eager to prove" girl, Jane MacNaughton. He talks about how she goes from being, "the fastest runner in the seventh grade", to a "Mother of four." Jane who spurned the earth, as a seventh grade runner, left behind the "slow-footed yokels" in her cloud of dust. The playground champion is finally overcome by reality. She returns to dust as a victim of the "eternal process". During a school dance, Jane "with a light/Grave Leap", touches the end of a paper ring.

Dickey sees this as a farewell to childhood and a new beginning into adulthood. She is well respected by others and has self-respect, at least enough to leap to touch the paper chain in front of her classmates. She is a young, strong girl and has a world of opportunities at this time in her life. He describes her as the, "the fastest runner in seventh grade." This implies that she is a girl who capable of accomplishing any dreams she wishes. Dickey knew and admired Jane, he was "nailed to the ground", unable to escape his feelings for her ever since the seventh grade.

He feels a connection to her when she touches the paper ring hanging from the ceiling. He says that she "touched the end of something I began." He does not make it sound as if he had a personal relationship with her; however he says that she should hold on, "to that ring I made for you." He wants the Jane of his school age memory to hang on to the paper ring so that he will always remember her as a young, "muscular, wide-mouthed, eager to prove," girl that is capable of doing anything. He uses the ring as a symbol

in his memory, as a way to keep her alive so that he does not have to cope with her death.

The ring can also be a symbol of marriage or companionship. He uses this first leap to represent Jane in all of her brilliance, as he remembers, so that he will not have to face the fact that she is not who she used to be and to honor her as the outgoing seventh grader who was willing to live life to the fullest. He does not go into detail to describe the second leap. This may be because he knows more about her in her childhood, or it may be because he does not want to know about her death at length. When she committed suicide, he knows she is not the same person that he once knew; she is now a, "mother of four. She has changed, but it has not been for the better because she may have had a hard life. One day she was unable to handle the pressures of her life any longer and committed suicide. He says, as he holds the newspaper containing the article of her suicide, " that I held / without trembling a picture of her lying cradled / in the papery steel as though lying in the grass. " It is not that he does not care about her death; he just cannot face her death and this is why he does not tremble. She is hardly the same person to him, and so he is able to save the image of her first leap.

He will always use this one image as her identity, full and alive, to him. These two leaps are different, but are used to represent the same idea. Jane leapt in order to express her sense of freedom in the first leap. She leapt with strength; she showed to everyone around her that she was very alive, free and capable. Yet, the second leap was a cry for help, a searching for freedom. By taking this second leap she was able to become free by death. Her life was hard by, " some boy who did not depend/On the speed of foot,

caught and betrayed her,” and the heartache was too much for her to handle, so she took the leap so she can be free.

The two instances are so different that he is able to separate them in his mind and supplement his memory for childhood Jane, who he saw gracefully leaping with a sense of ambition to touch the paper ring and the Jane of modern reality, who leapt to her death from a hotel window to rest in the, “papery still” of a taxi cab, still graceful as “though lying in the grass.”

### **Work Cited**

1. Dickey, James. “The Leap”. Literature and the Writing Process. Ed. Elizabeth McMahan, Susan X Day, Robert Funk, and Linda S. Coleman. 9th ed. 2011. pg 630. Print.