

Hail mary by tupac shakur a literary analysis



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The song “ Hail Mary” by Tupac Shakur has sparked continued interest and attracted much criticism. Tupac’s application of the eternal theme of the struggle between good and evil to the cycle of prey vs. predator that is showcased in “ Hail Mary” is unique and incorporates heart, mind, body and soul. Tupac explores the catch 22 of falling prey to evil if choosing to become a predator in order to survive, and shares the conflicting emotions of many young African American men who have been born into this. Using metaphors, symbolism, strong imagery, and oxymorons, Tupac illustrates the ups and downs of the prey vs. predator cycle and expresses the conflicts that come with the frustration of being stuck in this dark satirical allegory. First he sets the tone by reducing his limited options to one simple question, “ Do you wanna ride or die?” It is a metaphor and poses to the listener the very intense question of what are you willing to do to survive and how much do you want to live. His answer is clear in the opening sentence, “ I ain’t a killer, but don’t push me,” and gives us further insight to his reality while hinting at the struggle to come.

Tupac then, by the usage of words and the mixing of terms, begins to weave a satire of new meanings by ridiculing the cycle of life that he is living in and the difficult, yet obvious choices that have to be made in order to survive. The satire becomes twisted and turns as it gets darker and the layers of meaning thicken and evoke emotions of pride when he says “ Peeped the weakness in the rap game and sewed it” and then guilt with “ Bow down, pray to God...” ; Tupac is torn with conflict, all the while maintaining a small glimmer of hope. Hope that the Mother Mary may be there in the hour of his passing as she was in the hour of the death of her son when he was crucified

on the cross (“meanings,” 2012). He says, “Hail Mary, catch me if I go.”

Hope is then only to be followed by despair, and the cycle starts over again.

We hear the repetitions of a church bell over and over, which are hauntingly dark and achieve a constant sensation of being trapped in a conflicting cycle of hope vs. despair when faced with having no choice but to be the predator. The Mother Mary is the strongest symbol that repeats itself throughout the whole song. She resembles hope in a desperate situation. Hope that the gates to heaven will be open at the end of it all. Hope that she understands what “thugs” have done during their lives. Then we hear the confession of “...revenge is like the sweetest joy” hinting at Tupac getting caught up and confused between good and evil and surrendering, to temptation this time, to be the predator, which ultimately turns him into prey to evil and we hear another “Hail Mary”. He surrenders to her and abandons control with “... if they can’t adjust, it’s just well, Hail Mary.” Tupac, compares himself to Jesus, “Eat the flesh of my flesh and follow me.”

Here he is inviting the listener to follow his way of thinking and to open up their minds. He was frustrated with mainstream thinking and wanted to reincarnate public opinion with hopes of breaking the cycle. The chorus supports this by reading “Come with me, Hail Mary, run quick see,” as was said in the bible when Jesus was found resurrected (Mooch & Ridlet, n. d.). The resurrection is a symbol for new beginnings as well as supports the tone of a cycle continuing with that little glimmer of hope in the dark. Tupac opens up the imagery with “Picture paragraphs unloaded, wise words being quoted.” Here he preparing the listener to picture what he is about to say while establishing an underling rhythm of gun shots as his “wise words” are

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unloaded like a gun unloads bullets. He continues with strong images of being a ghost in the killing fields which brings to mind images of the streets being a haunted war zone. The word “ghost” is important here as it resonates strongly with the repeated chanting of Hail

Mary, and may symbolize a deeper meaning and refer to the “Holy Ghost”. Ghost resembles both predator and prey at the same time as it is associated with death. Death can be the killer, or one who has been killed. Tupac uses the word “Klluminati”, which is an oxymoron because kill represents death and destruction, while illuminati stems for the concepts of enlightenment and knowledge. His play on words here resonates with the “thug life” that he explores and through the song evokes from one a feeling of illumination or enlightenment to understand what it is to have to kill in order to survive.

The Illuminati are also a well know secret society of white European descendant that are believed to hold a vast data bases of knowledge and who may have some higher plan to govern the world in a new world order. This concept coupled with doing what is necessary to survive may allude to an uprising of African Americans through enlightenment in the mind, while always being conscious of the enemy: the white American institutions and their deceiving lies. He refers to penitentiaries packed with promise-makers and institutions producing lives made to crumble. Shakur was shot at the age of 25 while riding in a car in Las Vegas on September 7, 1996. He died six days later, approximately one month after “Hail Mary” was recorded (Tupac, 2013).

The fact that this song was played as part of a performance incorporating a projection of Tupac alongside live performers Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg at the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival last year, clearly indicates that the song, still resonates strongly with contemporary listeners. The lyrics have been pulled apart and the meaning argued over and over again to this day. In the preface to *A Rose That Grew in the Concrete*, Tupac's mother, Afeni Shakur (1999), wrote, "Tupac felt that through art he could incite a new revolution that incorporated the heart, mind, body and soul." She went on to say that "He wanted his art to instill honesty, integrity, and respect"; all of which are good reasons to take another listen to what he had to say in 1996, today.

Tupac (1996) wrote:

In the event of my demise when my heart can beat no more, I hope I die for a principle or a belief that I had lived for. I will die before my time because I feel the shadow's depth so much I wanted to accomplish before I reached my death. I have come to grips with the possibility and wiped the last tear from my eyes. I loved all who were positive in the event of my demise.