

The centaur essay



The poem "The Centaur", written by May Swenson allows readers the opportunity to see through the eyes of a young girl as her imagination brings a hand crafted piece of wood to life; transforming it into a majestic stallion. As she lets her imagination flourish throughout her experience the reader sees how the girl and stallion become one. Swenson's careful choice of words contain abundant elements of language, imagery, and structure throughout the poem which is what opens the girls experience up to the reader so well.

The light tone and the mood in which the work is written brings the girls memory and recollection of her experience to life very well. The poem begins with the speaker remembering a long summer season where she was 10 years old. "Can it be there was only one/ summer that I was ten? It must/ have been a long one then" (lines 2-3). These lines show the reader that the speaker has a lot of memories about this summer since she can recall so much from when she was 10. The opening lines contain a bit of rhythmic flow which makes the entrance quite natural and gentle.

These lines alone clarify that the point of view comes from a young girl trying to collect her thoughts and memories of that summer. The author illustrates the magical, adventurous, and liberating moments the girl experienced which brings about a blissful tone throughout the entire piece. The girls' flashback of this particular horse ride reveals to the reader not only her enjoyment of the ride itself but the pure bliss that she experienced by being one with her creation, a bliss which no regular person could feel or understand; the bliss of being a centaur.

While on her horse ride the little girl has nothing else on her mind other than what lies in front of the dusty path that she is trotting on. “ I’d straddle and canter him fast/ up the grass bank to the path, / trot along in the lovely dust/ that talcumed over his hoofs, / hiding my toes, and turning/ his feet to swift half-moons” (lines 17-22). The writer hints throughout the poem of a day that is accommodated by gentle breezes and a beautiful dusk sunset on a summer day.

The description of such a day is inclined towards what most persons acknowledge to be a “ beautiful” day, further promoting the feeling and tone of pure bliss in the poem. The author takes the girl and her horse through a full blown horse ride all the way from “ a gallop along the bank” (line 42) to “ negligent riding” (line 46). She even goes as far as parking the horse, “ I tethered him to a paling/ dismounting” (lines 50-51). Swenson’s use of imagery is what makes the poem so powerful and easy to visualize for the reader.

The poem continues through the speakers usage of imagery in lines (6-8) “ I’d go out to choose/ a fresh horse from my stable/ which was a willow grove/ down by the old canal”. At this point in the poem the reader takes a noticing to the fact that her “ stable of horses,” which she picks a horse from is in actuality a grove of willows by some old canals. Through this usage of imagery the reader can also understand how she made her horse; the imagery though is what actually brings this creation to life in the poem. Her imagery is very in depth especially when describing how the girl imagines herself to appear during the ride. The willow knob with the strap/ jouncing between my thighs/ was the pommel and yet the poll/ of my nickering pony’s

head” (line 23-26). Similarly, in lines 27-28 “ My head and my neck were mine, / yet they were shaped like a horse,” the author uses a simile in addition to creating clearer images and pictures in the mind of the reader. The author begins to really hint that the young girl is actually a part of her fictional horse by going into deeper detail in how the girl envisions herself, “ My hair flopped to the side/ like the mane of a horse in the wind”.

The imagery keeps becoming more and more concrete to the fact that she is one with her willow crafted horse as the poem progresses until she actually states through a metaphor that the girl was one with the horse and that her feeling of bliss had reached its climax, “ I was the horse and the rider” (line 38). Finally the author ends the poem with the girls’ arrival home from her journey that summer day. “ At the walk we drew up to the porch. Dismounting, I smoothed my skirt/ and entered the dusky hall” .

During that moment the girl’s mother starts a small dialogue with her daughter where she says the following: “ Where have you been? Said my mother” (line 55). By adding a dialogue, Swenson makes her poem sounding quite narrative. In addition, the dialogue portrays the type of personality the girl has which seems much like a child’s; carefree and good-natured. It is obvious that the child is attempting to break out from reality through her thoughts and ideas. Particularly towards the end her mother’s questioning about her mouth being green; leads to an attention-grabbing answer which states, “ Rob Ray, he pulled some clover as we crossed the field, I told her” .

The last line of the poem has a great affect now that we know that she named her fictional stallion Rob Ray. As a result, the language used within

the poem seems to have a very easy flow to the reader without any rhyme to them at all. May Swenson's careful choice of various elements such as language, imagery and structure complete the meaning in the composition because all the elements included make a big part of the characters actions.