

Theodore roethke's "i knew a woman" essay sample

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In the Poem "I Knew a Woman," the author, Theodore Roethke, uses figures of speech, primarily hyperbole and metaphor, to reveal the wonders of a woman's body, as well as to amplify pleasures in sexual relations that the speaker had with her. The fact that Hyperbole is used to describe the woman repeatedly throughout the poem suggests that she has great importance to the speaker and also implies his attitude towards her to be of amazement and admiration.

The speaker's use of Figure of speech is first introduced in the first stanza of the poem. Here Roethke uses word repetition in lines 2-4, creating a tone that is witty and playful, linking this attitude to his relationship with the woman. The use of word repetition (ex: L2 "When small birds sighed, she would sigh back at them") is dominant in the first stanza, but also appears in the 2nd and 3rd stanza, which function to keep a playful tone throughout the entire poem. For example line 17 "She played it quick, she played it light and loose" implies their relationship to be playful and fun versus serious and romantic.

In addition to the use of word repetition, the speaker also uses line 3 "Ah, when she moved, she moved more ways than one" to imply that the poem will move in many ways also. Line 4, "The shapes a bright container can contain!" is a pun, or a double meaning for the shapes that a woman makes in motion, since motion is emphasized throughout the poem. For example, Line 9 "She taught me Turn, and Counter-Turn, and Stand" creates vivid imagery of motion and dance, and also the mention of "mowing" L14 and "

She moved in circles, and those circles moved" L21, contain sexual suggestiveness.

In the second stanza, the speaker uses metaphor to depict strong sexual connotations. In addition to the suggestiveness of the phrases " She stroked" L8, " She Taught me touch" L10, and " I Nibbled meekly from her proffered hand" L11, a metaphor for the speaker and the woman's physical relationship is introduced in lines 12-14. Line 14 states " But what prodigious mowing did we make," where the word " mow" means to engage in sexual intercourse. Also, in line 13, it is said that " She is the sickle," a metaphor for the woman's role in this relationship, since a sickle is the tool that does the mowing in real life. This implies that she is the one in control of their sexual encounter, further personified in line 16 " Her full lips pursed, the errant note to seize" and throughout the 3rd stanza.

As well as depicting the woman's dominant role in their relationship, the 3rd stanza also uses Hyperbole to emphasize the Speaker's feelings for her. For example, line 18 " My eyes, they dazzled at her flowing knees" is a hyperbole of the woman's movement and the author's reaction to her. Although knees would not be described as " flowing" in real life, the speaker uses the phrase " her flowing knees" to emphasize how the woman was smooth, graceful, and free. Also, by saying " My eyes, they dazzled," implies his attitude of amazement and bewilderment towards the woman. Hyperbole is first used in line 5 " Of her choice virtues only gods should speak" and again in line 25 " I swear she cast a shadow white as stone" to emphasis the woman's importance to the speaker.

In the final stanza, the speaker links his feelings for the woman with time and aging. Line 22 " Let seed be grass, and grass turn into hay" is a figure of speech that makes reference to the life cycle of grass and has sexual imagery of " mowing," the word " seed" also having sexual connotation. In lines 26 through 28, Roethke uses a synecdoche of " These old bones" to compare his own age and old bones to her " lovely ones" L1. He also implies that the woman gives the speaker his youth and liberation, choosing not to " Count eternity in days" L26, instead to " Measure time by how the body sways." L28 The author uses different figures of speech from beginning to end of the poem in order to subtly depict the woman's sexuality and grace, as well as the youthfulness and liberation that she brings to the speaker through their relationship.