

Essay on rocurring themes and literary interpretation of floating

[Philosophy](#), [Freedom](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In Karen Brennan's short story "Floating" the narrator is a woman who

awakes levitating followed by her hearing the sound of a baby crying at the back of the house. She brings it in and changes its clothes. It is still alive after two days of crying. She suddenly notices that she could levitate as her toes touched the ceiling. She is wearing new black boots that her husband told her remind her of a nun. She attracts her husband's attention to her new found power but he does not seem amazed or surprised. It even seems that he does not notice as all.

After waking, she moves around her house, floating past her coffee table

which she describes as a "gracious, but unpretentious arrangement." The narrator continues her floating past different objects, which a reader may see as symbols. These include a world map, her grandmother's mirror, which she says has an "uncharacteristically glamorous reflection of herself" in it. The narrator seems at this point alone and unable to join the real world. Even after she says that her husband calls for her to come down, she is unable to and ponders if her husband is aware of the baby floating with her. The narrator believes that her husband finds her floating is no longer amusing, though the narrator refers to it as a miracle. The other miracle, is the baby that she keeps in a drawer lined with dark blue velvet located in a back storage back room where old papers and photographs, are kept. There is also a window that has been shot out with a bb, where with a cracked

sheet-tacked window making the room cold and dark. Another sheet covers the window which blocks the view of life outside.

She continues to float around her house and above her husband who is busy in making

spaghetti. He seems to not notice her at all, and it appears that maybe only the floating

narrator thinks he is aware of her presence. His sarcasm drops from the words “dinner

is served”. He is never impressed no matter what she does. She can hear baby’s

thoughts. The second setting is a room with Satan who the narrator confesses she

finds very attractive and she would never forget her voice.

Brennan’s “Floating” offers a window into an imaginative world of a depressed and anguished wife who seems entirely detached from the immediate world while still maintaining a fleeting presence there. And mother whose every word and thought muses over the lament of her loss of a baby. Apparently, it might sound as a case of miscarriage but from the final scene hints to some sort of guilt ridden on the husband’s mind as well, indicating to the fact that it might be a case of forced abortion or of miscarriage due to negligence as well”

The narrator is not satisfied with the present state of her floating and detachment. She says, “a long piece of spaghetti dangling from my mouth to tantalize him. Spaghetti kiss? I say. Because I want us to be friends, to be affectionate to one another.” (Brennan, 304)

When she says she is married a responsible husband, she seems to have said it less to inform anyone else but more to convince herself. The agony of the wife inside her is apparent in the following words:

“ But now I could use some help,” he says. (Brenna, 303(

However, the lowered glance can be viewed as the husband's helpless submission to situation in their relationship as well, as the wife does not sound as innocent when she thinks:

The basic levitation seems either to be the imagination of the of the wife, or perhaps the wife is not of the world she is describing. What is most dislodging about the story is that strange things are described with a surprising casualness. The narrator describing a baby as “ This is a secret baby: the baby of my afterhours.” This is not a normal baby description, but no further explanation is granted. Flying is an idea strongly connected to one's sense of freedom. Physically, this is the highest form of freedom. She projects the imagination of flying or levitation because her heart always craved for absolute freedom from the situation of her married life and of the present loss of the baby, yet her flying seems to confine her. The author's intention may be to relate instead of freedom, detachment from the world. Out of all types of devices like taking recurrent shower, constantly washing hands, secluding oneself from everything and the like, this particular imagination of flying is very appropriately used here; as it simultaneously represents the free spirit, craving for freedom, death wish and guilt of the wife.

The description of the child's being alive serves contrastively as a device to

represent the angst of its mother. At this point, better props like the grave of the child could serve better to represent this pain. Notably, names have not been used to make the story spontaneously identifiable to all sort and regions of readers. However, it has not been considered that, the sheer personal manifestation of angst through levitation itself may obstruct mass identification with the image, since that image of freedom or guilt is too personal to appeal to readers on an average. Similarly, very few people in their imagination would be able to imagine a dead baby alive to awake to reality to find out that the baby is gone and bear the doubled pain again. Rather, to picture something as real as a grave would be much more identifiable in general.

For such a story, setting the atmosphere at the very outset, if the scene deserves, often means half impact achieved. As we see in the paragraph of the description of the back room where notebooks and old photographs are kept, the same graphical devices like old photograph, tucked sheet on the broken window and consequent darkness and cold, mother's old blue velvet etc. could be used to create a vivid picture to evoke the sense of a central atmosphere and tone in the very first paragraph. Even that would increase the rate of readers' identifiability to a culminating extent. Though the plain start was striking enough to grab the readers' attention, the same startling aspect is the very reason of a sort of queer detachment on the reader's part with the story.

The account of the market place lady's face to face chat with Satan is in fact an apparent plot- parallel, but how far it is an appropriate parallel that is something questionable. If the entire plot main plot is considered, the wife is

kind of relating a lot about her life out of a sentiment, whereas that lady was forced to tell her life story to Satan. There remains a difference between the levels of intention. Satan is found very attractive by the lady which indeed parallels on the implicit level of intention of living, after all, by the wife.

However, as per parallel, Satan definitely does not match the husband as a character. The husband seems neither so strong nor so attractive; rather affectionate, annoyed and passive.

Overall, it is a strong depiction of a woman detached from her life. The author has taken a very common image of levitation and turned it into the driving device of the entire thematic plot. We often share this image of ourselves as flying above all our crises. Devices like satisfying with only blue velvet in place of creamy Satin, floating as chaotically as upside down over dinner table, the beauty of the baby's soft breathing and stoned eyelid, the old photographs juxtaposed with the baby in the store, the almost whispered song of the mother in the child's ears, the husband's anger belittled by her height etc. all serve wonderfully in both graphical and thematic terms in the plot. However, there still seems to be plenty of room for improvement which would make the story more graceful and identifiable.