

The poem “To the Foot, from its Child” by Pablo Neruda is about a foot and its journey. This foot encounters many things along its journey and changes because of this. This poem utilizes symbolism, imagery, and figurative language to illustrate these changes the foot encounters along the way. From analyzing the poem, we can see that the poem itself is a metaphor for the cycle of life and that the foot is a symbol of life and furthermore the poem shows us how life begins to weather this foot, and in that changes it to conform with the rest of society.

The poem “To the Foot, from its Child” is an overall metaphor encompassing the journey of life or the cycle of life. Pablo Neruda writes that “[t]he child’s foot is not yet aware it’s a foot” (1) not unlike how children don’t know what they are until they are older. Children tend to understand what they can and cannot do as they learn by making mistakes and hurting themselves through “the paths in the rough earth” (5). Things such as “teaching the foot that it cannot fly”(6) as the foot represents the child. The poem moves forward and we can see the foot, which represents life, changing as it encounters new challenges and begins to conform to the world as if it was “condemned to live in a shoe” (12). The shoe representing social norms and the foot being forced into them as it matures, like as humans mature and become trapped into growing up. To further this idea of conforming to society Neruda illustrates how the foot “take[s] on the form of eyeless reptiles” (23) as if to represent people walking blindly in life without actually paying any attention to the world around them. The poem itself goes through the stages of life beginning in infancy when a child doesn’t yet know what it is and believes it could be anything like “a butterfly or an apple” (2) however it ends with explaining how “it never knew it

had ceased to be a foot” (50) as the foot represents a life ending. This furthermore shows us how the foot is symbolic of the cycle of life and how we live and die and how we encounter “stones and bits of glass,/ streets, ladders” (3-4) that represent obstacles that change us into different people who eventually attune to the social norms of the world without even realizing it. This shows us how society ceases to reach for their dreams and simply gives up to live like everyone else.

“To the Foot, from its Child” uses imagery quite well to illustrate to us how exactly the foot changes and how it becomes blind in its ways. Neruda explains how “[b]it by bit, in the dark, /it grows to know the world in its own way” (13-14). This is referring to the foot learning the way of life in the dark, telling us that the foot really doesn’t actually learn anything for it is blind to the real world and it learns how to live this way. The poem goes on to explain how the foot is “feeling out life like a blind man” (16). This use of imagery makes us think about a man walking around blindly not knowing where he is going. As if to say this is how we live life, blindly walking around trying to find our way with no sight. Neruda uses this idea of the foot being defeated that leads to this idea that people eventually fall into a usual pattern and don’t follow their dreams or live up to their full potential because of being trapped. He explains how “the child’s foot/ is defeated, falls/ in the battle,/ is a prisoner/ condemned to live in a shoe” (8-12). Essentially using imagery to portray the image of someone being defeated and taken prisoner to explain how as people grow older they become defeated by the world and become prisoner to social norms instead of living up to their full potential and remembering those dreams they had when they were young.

The last important part of the poem “To the Foot From its Child” is most definitely its use of figurative language. It uses personification and hyperbole to fully drive home its point of

portraying the cycle of life using a foot, along with the idea that everyone eventually becomes condemned to live the same life after being defeated by obstacles. The poem personifies how “the child’s foot/ is defeated, falls/ in the battle” (8-10) making it seem like the foot itself has human like qualities when in reality it is just a foot. This helps to solidify that this poem is surely talking about how the cycle of life and how through obstacles and hardships, people fall “in the battle” (10) of life and change because of that. These obstacles that the foot encounters like “stones and bits of glass” (3) weather the foot and eventually force it to become trapped in a shoe. And Neruda uses a hyperbole to exaggerate how consequently “this blind thing walks/ without respite never stopping” (30-31). Showing us how the foot becomes a machine, essentially, walking without stopping and without trying to reach its full potential and giving up on its dream of being a butterfly or an apple. This illustrates to us how as adults we condemn ourselves to move forward without looking back on our childhood dreams and considering their possibilities.

As we can see from the analysis of this poem, “To the Foot, from its Child” illustrates to its readers the cycle of life as personified through a foot. It relies on the use of symbolism, imagery, and figurative language for the most part rather than things such as rhyme and meter to fully show its purpose. Its purpose is to encompass the journey that humans go through in life, beginning in childhood, with hopes and dreams and ending in the grave. The poem illustrates the obstacles that the foot experiences leading to its entrapment to show how during the transition from childhood to adulthood we become trapped in the social norms and eventually walk without stopping until we are dead and without looking back. This is to show us that as humans we waste our potential by going along with the rest of society instead of holding onto those childhood

hopes and dreams. And overall how meaningless life is if we are to become trapped in the shoe of social norms instead of escaping that prison, that is the shoe, and think for ourselves.

Works Cited

Neruda, Pablo. Trans. Alistair Reid. "To the Foot, from its Child". *The Rattle Bag*, edited by Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes. Faber and Faber, 1982, pp. 435-36.