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“Laetitia Marie”

Having children can be one of the biggest blessings a mother could obtain. A mother can only imagine their life with that child. What they are not prepared for is losing them. There are many families who have the opportunity to spend their days with their loved ones while others are still suffering from losing someone important to them. No matter how much time passes with that one person, no matter how little one may know of them, they will forever be in their hearts, impacting their life and who they are as a person. Losing a child is one of the most devastating obstacles a mother can go through. When it occurs, it is very difficult to cope with. Laure Anne Bosselaar certainly proves that through her pantoum poem, “Stillbirth”. She demonstrates that giving birth to a stillborn child is a common grief that is horrible to bear on both one’s sanity and very being. In “Stillbirth,” Bosselaar uses imagery, repetition, and tone to develop the theme of permanent grief with distancing from the longing memories of her stillborn daughter.

Bosselaar uses the poetic device of imagery for the reader to picture the theme of permanent grief. At the very beginning of the poem Bosselaar says, “On a platform I heard someone call out your name/ No Laetitia, no/ … I rushed in, searching for your face” (Line 1, 2, 4). Hearing her stillborn daughter’s name in the train triggers memories, which causes her to rush onto this train hoping to find her. Afterward, she tries to make sure if it really is her daughter because her daughter is one of a kind. Just to be sure, she still searches in the train to see if it truly is Laetitia Marie. She declares, “No one in that car could have been you, but I rushed in, searching for your face (Line 6, 7). Even though her daughter’s name was Laetitia Marie, hearing just her first name, Laetitia, made her rush in the train searching for her. When she gets on this train she sees a thirty-two year old version of her daughter. “No longer an infant. A woman now, blond, thirty-two” (Line 8, 11, 23). Here she is imagining Laetitia Marie grown up or believes she is alive somehow. If one thinks about it, it is foolish to get on a train looking for a daughter you lost at birth thirty-two years ago. However, this line helps the reader understand the permanent grief with the unhealed wound of a mother naming her stillborn daughter but never being able to raise her as her own. She only desires to have raised her. Her daughter is the first and last thing she thinks about every day and it hurts to not have her by her side. As a result, the use of imagery develops the theme of permanent grief with distancing from the longing memories of her stillborn daughter.

Bosselaar also uses the poetic device of repetition to create a gloomy tone that demonstrates the permanent grief losing her stillborn daughter. Bosselaar repeats, “Laetitia Marie was the name I had chosen” (Line 10, 13, 22, 25) several times. This constant repetition of her daughter’s name in this poem is a form of comfort for her because it reminds her that her daughter was once living at a certain time. Bosselaar is also constantly repeating, “It wasn’t my train – the doors were closing” (Line 3, 18, 30) This train symbolizes her loss of her daughter. Getting on this train demonstrates that she wants to see her daughter again. However, it is not her train. In other words it is not her place to be in. Therefore, the use of repetition in this poem develops the theme of permanent grief with distancing from the longing memories of her stillborn daughter.

Lastly, Bosselaar uses a gloomy tone as a poetic device for the reader to feel sympathy with the permanent grief of distancing herself from her daughter. She states, “Some griefs bless us that way, not asking much space.” (Line 16, 19, 28). With this line, it can be interpreted that she is blessed by this grief because it has a lot of power to overwhelm her sense to enter a train to find a thirty-two year old version of her stillborn daughter. This grief has lived with her ever since and it is built in her very being. She announces, “I was told not to look. Not to get attached-” (Line 14, 17, 26, 29) With this line, the speaker seems like she becomes haunted when she sees a thirty-two year old version of her stillborn daughter. When she looks at this thirty-two year old version of her daughter, she does not want to look at her and become attached because it only reminds her that she lost her and could not keep her for that long as she wanted. Thus, the use of a gloomy tone develops the theme of permanent grief with distancing from the longing memories of her stillborn daughter.

A child is considered a gift of life by many. However, that petite gift may be taken away by the cruel mistress of death. “Stillbirth” is a poem that made a connection to all of its readers, those that have experienced the loss of a loved one, a child especially. For those that have lost a child without even knowing them, this poem has touched their hearts and souls in the most platonically intimate of ways. Overall, Laure Anne Bosselaar proves that losing a beloved in such a way as giving birth to a stillborn daughter can be quite difficult to cope with. It changes the person one is because there is a grief that becomes a heavy burden on a person’s shoulders that one cannot seem to shake off. This is a terrible burden to bear, yet many mothers are trapped by it, and Bosselaar has used this poem to show that it is a normal grief to bear. Through the poetic devices of imagery, repetition, and tone, Bosselaar develops the theme of permanent grief with distancing from the longing memories of her stillborn daughter.