

Title: Halo That Lit Twice

Number of Words: 700

Summary: This paper is a literature analysis of the poem Halo that Lit Twice. The paper deconstructed the different meanings of light all throughout the poem. This led to an emphasis on the significance of light and its meaning in terms of life and death. It focuses on the binary oppositions that transpired all throughout the poem and the binary oppositions that transpired in the realities of life/

### **HALO THAT LIT TWICE**

The analysis of the poem will focus on how the narrator understands light. There are several meanings of light in the poem. For the speaker to understand light, he has to compare it with two opposing nature, which is technically known as the binary oppositions. “Derrida asserts that people necessarily and automatically create binary oppositions as ways of easily discerning one thing from another” (Haslach, p1). I have found that light constitutes faith and intelligence; ethereal and corporeal; and life and death.

In the first two lines, the persona of the poem tries to understand the meaning of death. She questions why in the world of knowledge and science “..white/World...” death could still persist. The white world here is America, which became the second Alexandria. America is the “re-incarnation” of Alexandria. We know for a fact that Alexandria was the center of knowledge, science and mysticism in the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C. It is where the largest library of the world was built. It was the emblem of light--of knowledge (Kjielen, p.1).

The light of science in the next lines seemed to be vague. The persona does not understand what is happening. She is given medical terms that are related to the sickness

of the dying body. The sickness is found in the very center of the body, where the heart is, which is “Directly to the improbable thoracic/ cavity of me, ....” As she searches for knowledge or for light, she finds herself caught between science and faith. Breastplate, coat of arms, cow led friar and patron saint lead to the crusade of the Christians to defend their faith. Breastplate do not only protect the upper torso from bleeding when being struck by any weapon but it also symbolically protects the heart from falling out of faith. According to Alexander, “a lorica or breastplate was a mystical garment that was supposed to protect the wearer from danger and illness, and guarantee entry into heaven.” (p.1). However, she continues to question the Light, the emblem of God, for seeing death.

The friar who writes scholarly on faith like a saint could not explain death. The saint here on the other hand does not only tell us about faith but becomes the substitute or representative for “halo.” Halo indicates holiness, sacredness and purity.

The next half of the poem (lines 18-24), the speaker reveals to us who is dying. She then moves from the abstract idea of light (knowledge, power, and spirit) to a more tangible kind of light (material or corporeal).

She reveals to us about the birth of an infant, as can be seen in the line “Like the bundled one-ounce heart/ Of an infant harvested... .” But this infant is destined to die, as implied in the line “delivered here on ice.” It’s a biblical allusion to the end of the world-- that earth will be annihilated through fire or ice. She also tell us that the light pulsating is the one in ECG or the encephalogram connected to the baby, more

specifically connected to the upper torso where “thoracic cavity” is located. This ECG light determines the life or death of the baby. When the light blinks, the life continues. However, she tells us that this light “Which began to flutter faintly/Like the halo that lit twice,// That lit and faltered, halted, lit/ Once more, and then went out.” The baby dies in the end.

One of the intriguing things about the halo is that it “lit twice.” This phrase is not an “accidental light” rather it tells something about the duality of the nature of light. The duality parallels the form of the poem. The poem is in couplet and the lines in each couplet inform us about the pulsating ECG light. The number two in the poem also gives us not only the symbol of polarity but of something mystical about the light. In the Dictionary of Symbols, “Paneth sees [two] as the number that symbolizes dissociation, sharing, decomposition, and the ferment of the separation.” (p.471) True enough the number two in the poem tells us the decomposition of the infant’s body and his or her separation from the world and his or her mother.

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