

"The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner"

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
Six miles from Earth, loosed from its dream of life.
I woke to the black flak and the nightmare fighters.
When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

"The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" by Randall Jarrell is a poem about a soldier dying in the ball turret of a fighter plane during what was most likely World War II. The poem tells of the fear of young soldiers being sent to war and their thoughts of dying.

The poem is told from the point of view of a young fighter aboard a bomber during World War II. The fighter is positioned in the ball turret which was an enclosed bubble with a swivel gun in the belly of the plane.

This poem reads like a nightmare or dream being told by a soldier who has been taken from his childhood and thrown into war. The soldier describes the fear of awakening from the naive state of childhood into the preeminent likelihood of his death during the "State" of war (line 1). He describes the disconnection he feels from Earth and what he calls it "dream of life" as if life only existed in birth and death (line 3). When he awakens to "black flak" and "nightmare fighters" he seems to imply that all that lies between birth and death is war (line 4).

The theme to this poem emerges in the last line with almost a plea that he not be forgotten. When he says "they washed me out of the turret with a hose" he implies that there is nothing left including the memory of him and the war goes on.

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Works Cited

Jarrell, Randall. "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner." *The Harper American Literature*. Ed. Donald McQuade. New York: Harper Collins, 1996. 2594.