

How does the poet present the mother's thoughts and feelings about her son leaving home to join the army?

The poet uses ambiguous language to convey the mother as being sad about her son leaving for war. Weir uses the Biblical allusion "Later a single dove flew from the pear tree" to represent a sense of freedom in the son's movements. Doves can also be symbolic for hope and innocence, and this could be a reference to a famous story in the Bible where a dove is sent out from Noah's ark to find land after the flood. This could suggest that the mother feels deserted by her son, but also that she has hope that he will return to her.

The narrator also jumps in time a lot in the poem, hence the use of "later". She flashes back to playing at "being Eskimos" when her son was younger, indicating that she feels a sense of nostalgia and longing to go back to simpler times (perhaps to when the boy didn't have such dangerous responsibilities and she didn't have to contemplate losing him to war). There is also a sense of time escaping the narrator in this poem, as if she feels out of control. This is suggested in the phrase "a split second" and repeated use of lists. However, the elegant and calm movements of the dove flying contrast this earlier description of the boy leaving in "a split second". This rushed exit could have left the mother feeling lonely and forgotten amongst the "intoxicating" excitement of a brand new start for her son.

Weir also uses the simile: "the world overflowing/like a treasure chest". The phrase "treasure" could suggest that the mother feels as if her son's experiences in the army will enrich him and be varying and fulfilling. This could imply that she is in fact, happy for him. "Treasure" also connotes images of searching for gold and could be suggesting that the boy will have to work hard in the army to gain rewards and be respected. The word "overflowing" also suggests that perhaps he has lots to learn and that the mother shares some of her son's excitement.

Weir also uses lists to emphasise the mother's fears and attempts to reassure herself. She "rounded up as many white cat hairs as I could, smoothed down your shirt upturned collar". This portrays the mother as very maternal and caring, through how she is treating her son like a young child again. The use of lists helps the reader to get in the mind of this mother and see how she is trying to best prepare her son for the "overflowing" and chaotic world. These menial tasks also appear to be rather unimportant to the reader and contrast the importance of her son's job and role in the army. She also appears to be trying to focus on the positives as she "stealed the softening of my face" - in other words, she is putting on a brave face, despite her doubts. This presents the mother as deeply caring and sad to see her son leave. She appears to be finding it hard to let go of the little boy she once knew.