**Formalist Analysis Example**

**The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner, by Randall Jarrell**

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 black flak and the nightmare fighters.

When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

**New Critical explication for "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner"**

Randall Jarrell's poem "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner," though only five lines in length, stands as one of the most powerful anti-war poems ever written.

Reading the first line, one pauses slightly after "sleep," dividing the line in half. The halves make a sharp contrast. The point of transition in this line is "I fell", a helpless movement from the mother to the State, from sleep to the State. The mother and the State make an evident contrast, and so do "sleep" and "the State", which resemble each other in their first sound and in their position at the end of a half-line but which have such different associations, for sleep is comforting and the State is associated with totalitarianism. ("The country" or "the land" might be comforting and nourishing, but "the State" has no such warm suggestions.)

We will soon see in the poem that life in the "belly" of the State unnaturally cramps the man in its icy belly. He "hunched in its belly" until his "wet fur froze." We gather from the title that "its" refers not only to the State but also to the airplane in whose womblike ball turret held his confined existence and died. Given the title, the fur probably literally refers to the fur collar of the jackets that fliers wore in World War II, and it also suggests the animal like existence he led while confined by this unfeeling foster parent, the State-airplane. His unnatural existence is further emphasized by the fact that, in the airplane, he was "Six miles from earth." From such an existence, far from the "dream of life" that people hope for, and still hunched in the turret like a baby in the womb, he was born again, that is, he awoke to (or became aware of) not a rich fulfillment of the dream but a horrible reality that is like a nightmare. "Woke to black flak" imitates, in its rattling k's at the ends of words, the sound of the gunfire that simultaneously awakened and killed him. His awakening or birth is to a nightmarish reality and death.

It is not surprising, but it is certainly horrifying, that in this world of an impersonal State that numbs and destroys life, his body is flushed out of the turret with a hose. This is the third horrible release: the first was from the mother into the State; the second was from the belly of the State into the belly of the airplane; and now in shreds from the belly of the airplane into nothing, an act of metaphoric abortion. That this life-history is told flatly, with no note of protest, of course increases the horror. The simplicity of the last line, more effectively brings out the horror of the experience than an anguished cry or angry protest could do.

Adapted from Sylvan Barnet. *Writing About Literature* , 204-206.

Consider your interpretation as an argument. This means you must support a central claim with textual evidence and avoid falsifying anomalies. Your central claim should be a synthesizing statement that relates parts to the whole.