
Unit – II

1. The Flea Poem Summary

- Look at this flea and you'll see how small the thing that you deny me really is. It bit me first and now it bites you. In the flea, our two bloods are mingled together. You know that this isn't sinful or shameful; it's not a loss of virginity. And yet the flea gets to enjoy your blood without courting you first, and it grows fat digesting our combined blood. And that is more than we are allowed to do.

Wait, don't kill the flea and kill us with it! In the flea's body, we are almost, no, more than, married. The flea is you and me. It is our marriage bed, our wedding chapel. Though our parents' disapprove, we are safe within these dark, living walls. Though you may want to kill me, do not add suicide and sacrilege to your list of sins: three sins will come from killing the flea.

Cruel and unpredictable woman, have you stained your nails purple with the flea's innocent blood? The flea is guilty of nothing but sucking a drop of blood from you. Yet you exalt in your victory over the flea and say that neither you nor I are weaker for killing it. That's true enough and you should learn from that how false your fears are. You will lose as much honor when you give your virginity to me as this flea's death took from you.

Theme of the Poem

“The Flea” is a poem of seduction, but the speaker takes an unusual approach to getting his lady into bed. Instead of praising her beauty or promising her happiness, he instead insists that virginity is unimportant and that its loss will not be a significant source of shame or dishonor. In doing so, he pushes against the values of his society, which prized female virginity and pressured women to preserve it until marriage. “The Flea” thus tries to create a space for sexual pleasure outside the boundaries of marriage.

The speaker begins the poem in frustration, even exasperation, with the implication that his mistress continuously refuses to have sex with him. Though she does not speak in the poem, the reader can guess at her reasons for refusing the speaker based on the arguments the speaker makes to change her mind: she wants to preserve her virginity, and she worries that losing it outside of marriage will result in sin, shame, and dishonor.

The speaker attempts to address these concerns. Playing on the Renaissance belief that during sex the blood of the two partners mingled together, the speaker notes that their blood also mingles in a flea which has bitten both of them. Since it's not a sin or shameful for their blood to meet in the body of the flea, he argues, it's not a sin for the same thing to happen during sex.

The speaker's argument is not entirely convincing: even for a Renaissance reader, it would be surprising, even silly, to think that the most important thing about sex is the mingling of blood between the partners. There is something juvenile and provocative about the poem: some readers may feel that comparing sex to getting bitten by a flea is intended to be funny and gross, rather than seductive.

But underlying the poem's bawdy humor, the speaker makes a surprising and potentially radical argument. Though he might have more success in seducing his mistress if he played along, promised to marry her and cherish her virginity, the speaker refuses to accept his mistress's and his society's values. Instead, he tries to *change* those values by downplaying the importance of virginity and of marriage itself. In the flea, he notes, he and his mistress are "more than married." What's more, he does not seem interested in reconciling their sexual adventures with social values: instead, he imagines that the flea itself offers a kind of refuge from angry "parents."

The speaker of "The Flea" is thus unusually ambitious. He seeks not only to seduce his mistress, but also to defy—and perhaps remake—social norms around sexuality. You might wonder how sincere the speaker is in advancing this proposal—it is awfully convenient that changing these mores would also fulfill his desires in this moment. Though "The Flea" makes radical proposals about sexuality, questions about the speaker's sincerity cut down the force of those proposals—and so too does the fact that the mistress kills the flea. She, at least, is unimpressed by the speaker's arguments.

2. "To His Coy Mistress" Summary

- If we had all the time in the world, your prudishness wouldn't be a problem. We would sit together and decide how to spend the day. You would walk by the river Ganges in India and find rubies; I would walk by the river Humber in England and write my poems. I would love you from the very start of time, even before the Biblical Flood; you could

refuse to consummate our relationship all the way until the apocalypse. My slow-growing love would gradually become bigger than the largest empires. I would spend a hundred years praising your eyes and gazing at your forehead and two hundred years on each of your breasts. I would dedicate thirty thousand years to the rest of your body and give an era of human history to each part of you. In the final age, your heart would reveal itself. Lady, you deserve this kind of dedication—and I don't want to accept any lesser kind of love.

But I am always aware of time, the way it flies by. For us, the future will be a vast, unending desert for all of time. Your beauty will be lost. In the grave, my songs in praise of you will no longer be heard. And worms will take the virginity you so carefully protected during life. Your honor will turn to dust and my desire will turn to ashes. The grave may be a quiet, private place—but no one has sex there.

Therefore, while your beauty sits right at the surface of your skin, and every pore of your body exudes erotic passion, let's have sex while we can. Let's devour time like lovesick birds of prey instead of lying about letting time eat away at us. Let's put together our strength and our sweetness and use it as a weapon against the iron gates of life. We may not be able to defeat time in this way, but at least we can make it work hard to take us.

Love and Death

“To His Coy Mistress” is a love poem: it celebrates beauty, youth, and sexual pleasure. However, the speaker of the poem is haunted by mortality. Though he imagines a luxuriously slow love that takes thousands of years to reach consummation, he knows such a thing is impossible: he will die before it can be accomplished. Death cannot be delayed or defeated; the only response to death, according to the speaker, is to enjoy as much pleasure as possible before it comes. He urges the woman he loves not to wait, to enjoy the pleasures of life without restraint. The poem draws a contrast between two kinds of love: the full, rich love that would be possible if everyone lived forever, and the rushed, panicked love that mortal beings are forced to enjoy.

The first stanza of the poem poses a question and explores a hypothetical world: what would love be like if humans had infinite time to love? In response, the speaker imagines a world of unlimited pleasure. For example, he describes his mistress finding precious

stones on the banks of the Ganges; he describes himself spending two hundred years praising a single part of her body.

The key to this paradise, then, is that the normal limitations of human life have been removed. The sheer length of the mistress's and the speaker's lives allows them to delay consummation of their love indefinitely: the speaker announces that his mistress might "refuse / 'Till the conversion of the Jews"—which, in the Christian theology of Marvell's time, was expected to occur during the biblical Last Days. In this ideal world, the speaker feels no urgency to consummate their relationship.

The speaker has no questions about whether his mistress deserves this long courtship, but he does have qualms about its viability. He is, he notes at the start of stanza 2, always conscious of the passage of time—and thus of the fact that both he and his mistress will eventually die. Stanza 2 diverges from the beautiful dream of stanza 1, reflecting instead on the pressing, inescapable threat of death.

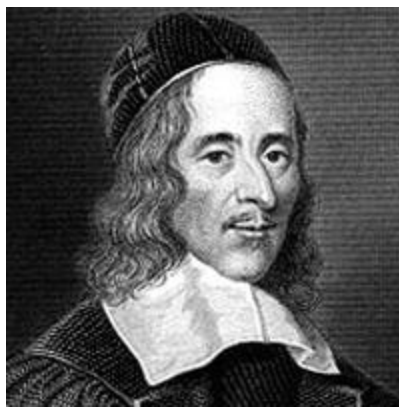
Death, as the speaker imagines it, is the opposite of the paradise presented in stanza 1: instead of endless pleasure, it offers "deserts of vast eternity." The speaker's view of death is secular; he is not afraid of going to Hell or being punished for his sins. Instead, he fears death because it cuts short his and his mistress's capacity to enjoy each other. In death, he complains, her beauty will be lost and—unless she consents to have sex before she dies—her virginity will be taken by worms. The language of this stanza is grotesque. This is a poem of seduction, but it feels profoundly unsexy. The speaker's horror of death overshadows his erotic passion, but it also makes the speaker seem more sincere: while at first it might seem that the speaker is saying all these things primarily because he just wants to have some sex, the despair in the poem implies that the speaker's arguments are not mere rhetorical statements but rather deeply held beliefs and fears.

In the final stanza of the poem, the speaker finally announces his core argument: since death is coming—and since it will strip away the pleasures of the flesh—his mistress should agree to have sex with him soon. What's more, he imagines that their erotic "sport" will offer compensation for the pain and suffering of life. "Our pleasures," he argues, will tear through "the iron gates of life." Though he does not imagine that their pleasure will defeat death, he does believe that pleasure is the only reasonable response to

death. Indeed, he even says that enjoying pleasure is a way to defy death. However, the grotesque language of stanza 2 may overwhelm the poem's insistence on the power of pleasure. If sexuality is a way to contest the power of death, it nonetheless seems—even in the speaker's own estimation—that death is an overwhelming, irresistible force.

3. **The Pulley by George Herbert: Summary and Analysis**

The Pulley by George Herbert is a religious, metaphysical poem which centers on the 'pulley' as a prime conceit in the poem. Herbert wants to unveil the truth that why human beings are so restless and unsatisfying despite having all the things he wants.



George Herbert (1593-1633)

After God made this universe, he gathered all the blessings of the world in a glass and distributed them to the human beings one after another. First, he gave the strength, therefore human became strong enough to survive. One by one, god gave them the beauty, wisdom, honor, pleasure and many other blessings. When almost all was gone, God kept 'rest' at the bottom of the glass, thinking that 'both should losers be' if the 'rest' is given. When they get all they want, in the sense of sufficiency, they may forget God. On one hand, when human beings get rest, they forget god and take a rest. As a result, god will lose the love and affection of human beings. On the other hand, when rest is given, people will lose strength, honor, wisdom and beauty and all other human capacities. God knows the man is by birth prone to lethargy. They will get rest at the cost of the progress. Progress and the rest never come together. We get one losing the other. God is sure that man will only praise the things God has given to them not the god himself. Mankind will lose their essence, get tired and wander in search of rest.

In the concluding part of the poem, Herbert gives two reasons behind human going to god. First, they will go to God out of the goodness, faith or divine emotions and inborn loyalty for him. Secondly, if they do not go to god out of the first cause, they will go to him when they are tired. Weariness takes human beings to the shadow of god. So, the God decides to keep the mankind away from the rest so as to make him feel the eternal rest can only be found in God. For the sake of the rest, at least man will remember to god and go to him for his love and rest. The repining restlessness or the discontentment with the worldly things will finally lead a man to god. He wanted man to discover the real rest only in Him. He alone can truly give the mankind the rest they frantically seek.

The poet answers in a simple tone that the reason behind man being so unsatisfying and weary is that God has not bestowed us with his precious jewel 'rest', but kept the jewel 'rest' with him. So for the sake of rest, we always run from here to there. We think now we are complete because we have everything, but the moment we feel so, another moment we feel empty and become restless. This is what exactly God wants us to be. If this happens to us then only we remember god and go to him for the 'rest.'

The title of the poem the pulley is a conceit that carries the theme of the poem. In pulley from the mechanical point of view to operate it a kind of power and force has to be applied to one end to lift the object of the other end. The force applied makes a difference to the weight that is being lifted. The 'rest' that god keeps with him is the leverage that draws the mankind towards god. Two quite different objects are forcefully compared here, one from the pure physics that is pulley and the other from the pure religion that is God. The relationship of man and god is compared with the metaphorical pulley. To pull mankind back to the God, back to his origin, God keeps man away from the 'rest.' This can only be possible in the metaphysical conceits. So the title is thematic.

4. Summary of The Retreat

'*The Retreat*' by [Henry Vaughan](#) describes a speaker's desire to escape to the past where he was a younger, purer, and generally happier human being.

The poem begins with the speaker mourning for the lost days of his youth. He longs to return to a time when he was in his "angel infancy" and had yet to be influenced by the dark forces of the

world. It would be a time in which he had yet to stray far from his home or realize the struggle that would take him over internally.

In the present day, he worries about his own emotions and the sinful nature of them. He is concerned over his own being in a way that was not even considered when he was young.

In the final lines, the speaker describes the end of his life and how he will return to the dust of the earth. This will be the penultimate ending for a man who longs for his previous life.

The Retreat

Lines 1-6

Happy those early days! when I
Shined in my angel infancy.

Before I understood this place
Appointed for my second race,
Or taught my soul to fancy aught
But a white, celestial thought;

In the first section of this piece, the speaker begins by making an exclamation, which at this point, has no defining context. On first reading, one might see this line as a celebratory statement, but after coming to a greater understanding of the text it becomes clear it is closer to grief than joy.

The speaker is looking back on the days of his youth and remembering what it was like when he “Shined in [his] angel infancy.” He is long past these moments but remembers them very fondly. They seem to him to be the clearest, purist, parts of his life. The following lines continue his reminiscence by speaking of how now he understands “this place.”

He knows the world he is living in and can see all of its dark corners. Before though, this was not the case. As a youth, he used to live so purely he didn’t even think about how “celestial” his thoughts were. Now, thinking clearly takes a concerted effort.

Lines 7-14

When yet I had not walked above
A mile or two from my first love,
And looking back, at that short space,
Could see a glimpse of His bright face;

When on some gilded cloud or flower
My gazing soul would dwell an hour,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity;

In the next section of *'The Retreat'*, the speaker goes on to describe what his life was like before he strayed far from home. It was during this period that he “had not walked” more than a “mile or two from” his “first love.” He had not seen very much of the world at this point and knew nothing about its dangers.

When he looks back now he realizes this was when he could “glimpse” the face of God. It was only for a “short” span this was possible and in moments in which he gazes upon a “gilded cloud or flower.” When he was young he could spend an hour simply contemplating the beauty of the natural world.

In the final lines of this section he speaks on the glimpses of “eternity” he caught in these moments. They were only “shadows” but they felt infinitely important to him.

Lines 15-20

Before I taught my tongue to wound
My conscience with a sinful sound,
Or had the black art to dispense
A several sin to every sense,
But felt through all this fleshly dress
Bright shoots of everlastingness.

In the next section, the poet continues on the same path of describing the life he used to lead when he was young. The speaker is remembering the years of his life which were not marked by his “tongue” wounding his own “conscience.” He didn’t worry about what was morally right or wrong, he simply lived as a young person.

This is expanded upon in the next lines in which he speaks of “black art” tainting emotions. Before he aged he did not worry about how he felt and if it was sinful. Now though, the nature of his own emotions bothers him. This has been brought on by the teachings of society and perhaps religion. Rather than experience these guilty thoughts about his own life, he felt within his

“fleshy dress,” or body, “shoots of everlastingness.” It seemed to his younger self that he would live forever in a perpetual state of youth.

Lines 21-26

O, how I long to travel back,
And tread again that ancient track!
That I might once more reach that plain
Where first I left my glorious train,
From whence th’ enlightened spirit sees
That shady city of palm trees.

The next part of *‘The Retreat’* takes a turn. He stops reminiscing and instead expresses his general longing for the past. He makes another exclamation stating, “O, how I long to travel back” to the past. The speaker would rather live in the past and walk again on “that ancient track” than live as he does now.

If he could return, he might have a [chance](#) of reaching “that plain” where he left his “glorious train.” He would hope to recover his previous state of being. He knows exactly where he left it too, on the hill alongside the “enlightened spirit.” The spirit, which represents his youth, is able to see the “shady city of palm trees” from where it rests.

Lines 27-32

But, ah! my soul with too much stay
Is drunk, and staggers in the way.
Some men a forward motion love;
But I by backward steps would move,
And when this dust falls to the urn,
In that state I came, return.

In the last six lines, the speaker mourns for what he will never have again. He has become “drunk” with his own longings and remembrances. The speaker knows it is not a healthy way to live as he will “stagger” about his life without purpose. This fact does not keep him from changing his opinion. He knows he is unlike other men; he loves the “backward steps” rather than the “forward motion.”

In the final two lines, he speaks about his own death. It will be the ultimate returning as he resumes the form of "dust." His body will return to the earth and become again what it was before he was born.