

One flesh essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

This poem is, as suggested by the title ‘one flesh’, about marriage. One flesh is a reference to marriage in the bible, where two become one. The poem is written in a first person point of view, with the poet writing about her parent’s marriage.

The first line of the poem gives us a feel that the poet’s parents have grown physically apart, as ‘lying apart now, each in a separate bed’ suggests. However, the phrase ‘lying apart now’ tells us that the poet’s parents did not use to be so far apart and were once close to each other.

The following lines tell us what the poet’s parents are doing (He with a book, keeping the light on late, she like a girl dreaming of childhood). This shows they both do not seem to notice the other party’s presence around them and are engaged in their own activity. The poet’s mother is dreaming about childhood where all men are elsewhere, suggesting that she does not care about physical relationships any longer.

The poet then tells us that ‘it is as if they (the parents) wait, some new event’, telling us that the poet’s parents are expecting something to happen that will affect their relationship together.

However the poet then shows that her parents are not deeply engaged in their own personal interior lives, but deep in thought, as the poet’s father’s book is not being read and the poet’s mother has her eyes fixed on the shadows on the wall (the book he holds unread, her eyes fixed on the shadows overhead). This shows that even though there is a great physical barrier between the poet’s parents, they are actually doing the same thing as each other without realising or knowing it.

The poet then describes her parents as having been ‘tossed up like flotsam from a former passion’. This visual imagery gives us the impression that the poet’s parents used to have a very passionate relationship which suddenly died away. Though the word passion suggests a strong, warm relationship, and further contrasted by the phrase ‘how cool they lie’ in line 8.

The poet’s parents ‘hardly ever touch’, showing the absence of a physical relationship between the two, which supports the first stanza which states that they lie apart in separate beds. However, the poet describes them touching each other as being a confession of having too little feeling or too much (it is like a confession of having little feeling – or too much). This tells us that if they were to touch it would mean they are inclined towards having too little feeling or too much.

Chastity faces the poet’s parents (chastity faces them), and the author describes it as ‘a destination for which their whole lives were a preparation’. This could mean that a couple’s marriage and life together is a preparation for chastity, perhaps not a bad thing but an escalated relationship going to a whole new level above a physical relationship, or perhaps chastity is the new event they have been waiting for.

In the third stanza, the poet says her parents are ‘strangely apart, yet strangely close together’. Although we may take one flesh literally, as only a physical thing, but the phrase ‘strangely close together’ suggests that one flesh might not only refer to the body, it may refer to the mind and soul as well.

The phrase ‘silence between them like a thread to hold and not wind in’ suggests that silence is what keeps the poet’s parents together. This suggests that though the poet’s parents do not have a strong physical relationship, their mental relationship is growing stronger and stronger. In the last 4 lines of stanza 3, the poet writes ‘And time itself’s a feather touching them gently. Do they know they’re old, these two who are my father and mother whose fire from I came, has now grown cold?’. To answer the poet’s question, I believe the poet’s parents know that they are growing old. For time is like a feather touching them gently, however a feather is soft and smooth and nice to touch, which symbolizes the poet’s parents welcoming of age.

The poet’s use of imagery in the poem greatly helps to illustrate the poet’s parents’ relationship. For example, the phrase ‘tossed up like flotsam’ shows us that the poet’s parents’ former passionate relationship was thrown away within a short period of time and regarded as nothing important (as flotsams are not important as they are just pieces of wood). The poem, though about marriage, has none of the warmth of being married, thus the setting gives the reader the impression that the relationship being portrayed here is not a well developed one, however the poet uses this to draw attention to the strong mental relationship her parents have.

The poet has written the poem in three stanzas with each stanza depicting each revelation of her parents’ relationship. In stanza one, her parents are lying apart in separate beds. In stanza two, her parents are awaiting chastity. In stanza three, the poet realizes that her parents have a strong mental relationship. If the poet’s message in the poem was to tell us about

how marriage is not only about the physical body but the mind and soul as well, he has conveyed the meaning of the poem very successfully.