

ASM TUITION ACADEMY

ONE FLESH

One Flesh

Lying apart now, each in a separate bed,
He with a book, keeping the light on late,
She like a girl dreaming of childhood,
All men elsewhere - it is as if they wait
Some new event: the book he holds unread,
Her eyes fixed on the shadows overhead.

Tossed up like flotsam from a former passion,
How cool they lie. They hardly ever touch,
Or if they do it is like a confession
Of having little feeling - or too much.
Chastity faces them, a destination
For which their whole lives were a preparation.

Strangely apart, yet strangely close together,
The silence between them like a thread to hold
And not wind in. And time itself's a feather
Touching them gently. Do they know they're old,
These two who are my father and my mother
Whose fire, from which I came, has now grown cold?

Context:

Elizabeth Jennings was a 20th-century British poet known for her introspective and often deeply personal poetry. "**One Flesh**" is likely autobiographical, reflecting her observations of her ageing parents. Written at a time when societal norms still highly valued marriage and lifelong commitment, the poem captures the emotional and physical distance that can develop between couples over time. The title, "**One Flesh**," is a biblical reference to the idea that married couples become united as one being, but Jennings contrasts this concept with the present reality of her parents, who are now physically and emotionally separated.

The poem reflects Jennings' reflection on the waning intimacy of her parents' relationship, providing an honest and tender look at how time can erode the passion that once existed in a marriage.

Themes:

1. **Emotional and Physical Distance:**

The poem explores the emotional and physical separation that has developed between a couple in their old age. Although they once shared intimacy and passion

(symbolized by the title, "**One Flesh**"), they now lie apart in separate beds, suggesting a significant distance, both physically and emotionally.

2. **Aging and Time:**

Jennings reflects on how time has changed the relationship. The couple, now old, experiences life differently from when they were young and passionate. The "**silence**" and "**cool**" tone of the poem suggest that time has worn down the fire of their relationship, leaving them with a quiet companionship rather than the fervor of their youth.

3. **Chastity and Restraint:**

The couple's relationship has evolved into one of **chastity**, a stark contrast to the passion of their earlier life. Jennings implies that their current state of sexual and emotional restraint is almost inevitable as people age. The couple seems resigned to this reality, and the poem reflects a sense of acceptance rather than frustration.

4. **Connection through Silence:**

Despite their physical separation and lack of intimacy, Jennings describes the couple as being "**strangely apart, yet strangely close together.**" The silence between them, while indicative of their distance, also serves as a thread that still connects them. This suggests that while passion may have diminished, the bond of shared life and memories remains.

Poetic Devices:

1. **Symbolism:**

- **Beds:** The separate beds symbolize the physical and emotional separation between the couple. They are no longer united in intimacy, and this separation mirrors the distance in their relationship.
- **Book:** The **book** the man holds may symbolize distraction or withdrawal. It is something that keeps him engaged but also keeps him apart from his partner. The fact that it is "**unread**" suggests that even this distraction may be a way to avoid confronting the lack of connection.
- **Light:** The **light** he keeps on late contrasts with the **shadows** overhead that the woman stares at, symbolizing their different internal worlds. While one keeps the light burning, the other is lost in thought, perhaps reflecting on the past.
- **Flotsam:** The couple is compared to "**flotsam,**" which is debris tossed up by the sea, suggesting that their passion, like something washed ashore, has been cast aside by time and circumstance.

2. **Metaphor:**

- "**Tossed up like flotsam from a former passion**": The couple's former passion is compared to debris or remains of something that was once powerful but is now discarded or diminished. This metaphor emphasizes the idea of emotional drift and the remnants of a relationship that has changed drastically over time.

3. **Imagery:**

- Jennings uses powerful imagery to evoke a sense of detachment and distance:
 - "**Lying apart now, each in a separate bed**": This opening image immediately establishes the emotional and physical separation.

- **"Her eyes fixed on the shadows overhead"**: This visual captures the woman's preoccupation with her thoughts, possibly reflecting her sense of loss or nostalgia.
 - **"Silence between them like a thread to hold"**: The silence is depicted as something that connects them in a fragile way, like a thread that binds them together despite their distance.
4. **Juxtaposition:**
- Jennings uses juxtaposition to highlight contrasts between past and present:
 - **"Cool they lie" vs. "former passion"**: The coldness of their present relationship contrasts with the passion they once shared.
 - **"Strangely apart, yet strangely close together"**: This phrase encapsulates the paradox of their relationship, where physical separation is counterbalanced by a strange emotional closeness born of shared history and life experiences.
5. **Alliteration:**
- **"Silence between them like a thread to hold"**: The repetition of the "s" sound emphasizes the softness and quietness of their relationship, highlighting the almost invisible connection they now share through silence.
6. **Enjambment:**
- Jennings uses **enjambment** (when one line flows into the next without a pause) to create a sense of continuous thought and reflection. This technique mirrors the speaker's contemplation of her parents' relationship, allowing the ideas and emotions to flow smoothly from one image to the next.
7. **Rhyme Scheme and Structure:**
- The poem follows a loose rhyme scheme, **ABABCC** in each stanza. The rhymes are not forceful, creating a gentle, flowing quality that reflects the subdued tone of the poem. The regularity of the rhyme scheme might also symbolize the routine and predictability of the couple's life together.
 - The poem consists of **three quatrains (six-line stanzas)**, a structured form that reflects the orderliness of their life. Yet, within this structure, Jennings conveys the emotional complexity and quiet turmoil beneath the surface.
8. **Tone:**
- The tone of the poem is **reflective** and **melancholic**, with an undercurrent of acceptance. The speaker seems to be observing the inevitable progression of life and relationships. There is no overt bitterness, but rather a quiet sadness as the speaker contemplates the distance between her parents and the lost passion they once shared.

Conclusion:

"One Flesh" by Elizabeth Jennings is a poignant exploration of the emotional and physical distance that can develop in long-term relationships as people age. The poem delves into themes of intimacy, ageing, chastity, and emotional connection, using powerful symbolism, imagery, and metaphor to convey the quiet sadness of a couple whose passion has cooled but who remain tied together by a lifetime of shared experiences. Jennings' use of a restrained tone and formal structure reflects the quiet, melancholic reality of their situation, offering a tender and insightful commentary on love and ageing.

COMPARISON WITH,

1-NATURAL TONES

2-THE MAN HUNT

To compare "**One Flesh**" by Elizabeth Jennings with "**The Manhunt**" by Simon Armitage and "**Neutral Tones**" by Thomas Hardy, we need to consider their exploration of relationships, emotional distance, and the effects of time and trauma. Although all three poems focus on love and relationships, they approach these topics from different angles, offering various insights into emotional and physical separation. Here's a detailed comparison based on **context, themes, and poetic devices**:

Context:

- "**One Flesh**" (Elizabeth Jennings):
Written from the perspective of a child observing her parents, this poem deals with the emotional and physical distance that develops between an aging couple. Jennings reflects on how the once-passionate love between her parents has faded into quiet companionship and separation, reflecting the inevitable effects of time on long-term relationships.
 - "**The Manhunt**" (Simon Armitage):
This poem explores the relationship between a soldier and his partner after the soldier has returned from war, physically and emotionally scarred. The poem is based on the experiences of a soldier's wife, whose husband has suffered injuries during military service. The partner searches for ways to reconnect with him emotionally, but trauma has created a significant barrier between them.
 - "**Neutral Tones**" (Thomas Hardy):
Written by Hardy in the late 19th century, this poem reflects on the emotional detachment and disillusionment that follows the end of a romantic relationship. Hardy uses bleak natural imagery to symbolize the death of passion and love, highlighting the emotional distance between the two individuals.
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Themes:

1. **Emotional and Physical Distance:**
 - "**One Flesh**": The poem focuses on the physical and emotional distance between an aging couple. Although they once shared intimacy and passion, they now sleep in separate beds, and their connection seems more rooted in shared history than in any present emotional closeness. The distance is depicted as the natural result of time.
 - "**The Manhunt**": The distance here is caused by trauma. The soldier's physical injuries and emotional scars have created a barrier between him and his partner. The poem explores the partner's attempt to reconnect with the

soldier and to "trace" his wounds, both physical and psychological, in an effort to heal their relationship.

- **"Neutral Tones"**: Emotional distance is the central theme, but in Hardy's poem, the distance comes from the gradual disillusionment in a failed romantic relationship. The speaker reflects on a moment by a pond where both individuals seemed emotionally detached, with the bleak landscape mirroring their lifeless connection.

2. The Passage of Time:

- **"One Flesh"**: Time is a key factor in the disconnection between the couple. Their emotional distance is not due to conflict or trauma, but simply the slow wearing down of intimacy over the years. Time has transformed their passion into silence and physical separation.
- **"The Manhunt"**: The effects of time are more related to healing. The partner takes a slow, patient approach to understanding and repairing the emotional and physical damage caused by the soldier's experiences in war. Time is necessary for the process of recovery and rebuilding the connection.
- **"Neutral Tones"**: Time in Hardy's poem reflects the stagnation and death of a relationship. The memory of the meeting by the pond is frozen in time, symbolizing how the relationship has become stuck in a state of emotional emptiness. The natural setting reinforces the idea that time has withered the love between the two.

3. Love and Intimacy:

- **"One Flesh"**: Love in this poem is portrayed as something that has shifted from passion to companionship. The couple no longer experiences physical intimacy, and even emotional closeness is strained, but there is still a sense of shared history and quiet understanding.
- **"The Manhunt"**: Intimacy is challenged by the soldier's trauma. The partner attempts to rebuild intimacy by carefully exploring his physical and emotional wounds. Love is portrayed as patient and tender, though the poem leaves open the question of whether the relationship can fully recover.
- **"Neutral Tones"**: Intimacy has completely deteriorated in Hardy's poem. The love that once existed has become bitter, cold, and devoid of connection. The speaker reflects on the deadness of the relationship, and the landscape reflects this emotional sterility.

4. Trauma and Conflict:

- **"One Flesh"**: There is no overt trauma in this poem, but the emotional distance feels like a quiet form of loss. The couple's separation is not due to conflict but the slow wearing down of love over time, leading to a form of emotional isolation.
 - **"The Manhunt"**: Trauma is central to this poem. The soldier's physical injuries and emotional scars create a barrier to intimacy. The partner's journey to rediscover her husband through his scars mirrors the trauma's lingering effects on their relationship.
 - **"Neutral Tones"**: While not about war or physical trauma, this poem explores the emotional conflict and disillusionment that often follow the breakdown of a relationship. The emotional wounds here are internal, and the memory of the failed relationship haunts the speaker.
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Poetic Devices:

1. Imagery:

- **"One Flesh"**: Jennings uses subtle, domestic imagery to capture the distance between the couple: **"separate beds," "a book,"** and **"shadows overhead."** These images suggest quiet separation and contemplation. The image of **"chastity"** as a "destination" emphasizes the couple's resigned acceptance of their distance.
- **"The Manhunt"**: Armitage uses imagery of the human body, likening the husband's scars and injuries to delicate, fragile objects, such as **"parachute silk"** and **"porcelain collar-bone."** This tender imagery underscores the wife's gentle attempts to reconnect with her husband and shows how trauma has physically and emotionally transformed him.
- **"Neutral Tones"**: Hardy's imagery is drawn from nature, with the **"winter day"** and **"gray leaves"** symbolizing emotional coldness and death. The **pond** is a stagnant body of water that reflects the stagnation of the relationship, while the **"white"** sun suggests lifelessness, rather than warmth.

2. Metaphor:

- **"One Flesh"**: The phrase **"tossed up like flotsam from a former passion"** compares the couple to debris left over from their once passionate relationship. This metaphor emphasizes how their connection has been reduced to remnants of what it once was.
- **"The Manhunt"**: The husband's injuries are compared to objects like **"fractured rudder"** and **"grazed heart,"** which are metaphorical representations of his physical wounds and emotional damage. The metaphors emphasize his fragility and the impact of war on his body and mind.
- **"Neutral Tones"**: The **pond** serves as a metaphor for the dead, stagnant relationship. The landscape as a whole reflects the emotional desolation between the two people, with nature acting as a mirror for the relationship's failure.

3. Tone:

- **"One Flesh"**: The tone is **melancholic** but reflective, with a quiet sense of resignation. The speaker observes the distance between her parents with a mix of sadness and understanding, recognizing that this distance is a natural consequence of aging and time.
- **"The Manhunt"**: The tone is **tender and cautious**. The wife approaches her husband's trauma with care and patience, as she gradually "hunts" for the man she once knew, hidden beneath his physical and emotional scars. There is hope in the tone, but also a sense of fragility.
- **"Neutral Tones"**: The tone is **bleak and bitter**. The speaker reflects on a failed relationship with emotional detachment and cynicism. The coldness of the imagery mirrors the emotional numbness and disappointment the speaker feels toward the relationship.

4. Structure:

- **"One Flesh"**: The poem is structured in three six-line stanzas, with a consistent rhyme scheme (ABABCC). This regularity mirrors the routine and predictability of the couple's relationship, but within this structured form, Jennings captures the emotional complexity of their separation.
- **"The Manhunt"**: The poem consists of unrhymed couplets, creating a sense of fragmentation, which mirrors the fractured relationship between the couple.

The short, precise stanzas reflect the careful, step-by-step process of healing and understanding.

- **"Neutral Tones"**: Hardy's poem is written in quatrains with an ABBA rhyme scheme, which creates a circular, repetitive feel, reinforcing the cyclical nature of the speaker's reflection on the relationship's failure. The structure contributes to the sense of being trapped in emotional stagnation.

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