

The poem, '*The Blossom*', by John Donne is one of those poems wherein the [Petrarchan](#) and Platonic conventions of love find an ironical treatment. According to the Petrarchan convention, the lover was devoted, faithful, and constant, while the beloved was cruel, proud, scornful, and unresponsive. She was often the wife of another, and so could not be approached as any contact with her would be illicit.

But still, the lover continued to love and adore her. Thus, Petrarchan love was a one-sided affair. On the other hand, in Platonic love, there might be some response on the part of the beloved, but then it was purely spiritual love, a union of minds, but not of the bodies. Donne has no use of such one-sided or purely spiritual love. In his view, the beloved should be responsive and love can be real and lasting, only when it is a union both of mind and the body. Therefore, the poet is not satisfied with his unresponsive beloved and leaves for London where he will find another friend who would be glad to have both his body and his mind.

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Thus, the theme of '*The Blossom*' is frankly Petrarchan, but it has been treated in an original and individual manner. Donne does not sigh Petrarchan woes, rather he treats Petrarchan convention of love ironically and exposes its hollowness. The [imagery](#) used is also Petrarchan.

Thus, 'blossom', 'flower', 'Forbidden and forbidding tree', 'heart' 'bud', 'bend', 'stiffness', etc., were the common stock in trade of the Petrarchan poets, but Donne has used this Petrarchan imagery to bring out the scornful pride of his beloved and the fleeting nature of her youth and

beauty. The poet's and [sarcasm](#) reach a [climax](#) when he says that for a woman 'a naked thinking heart' is a kind of ghost, and that, 'practice may make her know some other part', but, 'she doth not know a heart', for she has none herself.

The Blossom

John Donne

Little think'st thou, poor flower, Whom I have watched six or seven days, And seen thy birth, and seen what every hour Gave to thy growth, thee to this height to raise, And now dost laugh and triumph on this bough, Little think'st thou That it will freeze anon, and that I shall Tomorrow find thee fall'n, or not at all.

Little think'st thou, poor heart That labour'st yet to nestle thee, And think'st by hovering here to get a part In a forbidden or forbidding tree, And hop'st her stiffness by long siege to bow: Little think'st thou, That thou tomorrow, ere that sun doth wake, Must with this sun, and me a journey take.

But thou which lov'st to be
Subtle to plague thyself, wilt say,
Alas, if you must go, what's that
to me? Here lies my business, and here I will stay:
You go to friends, whose love and means
present Various content
To your eyes, ears, and tongue, and every part.
If then your body go,
what need you a heart?

Well then, stay here; but know,
When thou hast stayed and done thy most;
A naked thinking heart, that makes no show,
Is to a woman, but a kind of ghost;
How shall she know my heart,
or having none, Know thee for one?
Practice may make her know some other part,
But take my word, she doth not know a heart.

Meet me at London, then,
Twenty days hence, and thou shalt see
Me fresher, and more fat, by
being with men, Than if I had stayed still with here and thee.
For God's sake, if you can, be you
so too: I would give you
There, to another friend, whom we shall find
As glad to have my body,
as my mind.

The Blossom Analysis

Stanza One

Little think'st thou, poor flower,
Whom I've watch'd six or seven days,
And seen thy birth, and seen what every hour
Gave to thy growth, thee to this height to raise,
And now dost laugh and triumph on this bough,
Little think'st thou,
That it will freeze anon, and that I shall
To-morrow find thee fallen, or not at all.

[John Donne](#), in the first [stanza](#) of the poem, '*The Blossom*', addresses his beloved as poor flower, and says that he has been watching the growth of her youth and beauty for six or seven days, i.e. for some time past. He has seen the birth of her beauty, and how it continued to grow every day. Today proud of her youth and beauty she is triumphant like a beautiful flower, standing high on its stalk. She does not realize that her beauty is short-lived. Time will soon destroy her beauty as a flower is killed by frost and snow. Soon the poet will find her youth and beauty all fallen to pieces, as the petals of a full-grown flower fall to the ground, and all its beauty is no more.

Stanza Two

Little think'st thou, poor heart,
That labourest yet to nestle thee,
And think'st by hovering here to get a part
In a forbidden or forbidding tree,
And hopest her stiffness by long siege to bow,
Little think'st thou
That thou to-morrow, ere the sun doth wake,
Must with the sun and me a journey take.

The poet, through this stanza, addresses his heart and says that it is in vain for it to hover around his beloved, and in this way to try to secure a resting place in her love and affection. It will never succeed in its efforts, for she is both 'a forbidden', and a, 'forbidding tree'. She is a 'forbidding tree' because she is the wife of another, and she is also a, 'forbidding tree', because she has rejected the advances of the poet. It is wrong to suppose that her stiffness, i.e. [scorn](#) and contempt can be overcome by long and patient love-making. Tomorrow, before she, his Sun, is awake, the poet will start on his journey and his heart will have to go with him.

Stanza Three

But thou, which lovest to be
Subtle to plague thyself, wilt say,

Alas ! if you must go, what's that to me?

Here lies my business, and here I will stay

You go to friends, whose love and means present

Various content

To your eyes, ears, and taste, and every part ;

If then your body go, what need your heart?

In this stanza of '*The Blossom*', the poet's heart, which devise subtle means of self-torture, replies to the poet. Even if the poet goes away, it does not make much difference to the poet's heart. It is determined to stay behind and continue its love-making. The poet will have no need of the heart, for elsewhere he would find new friends who will provide him with full sensuous gratifications. His senses –eyes, ears and tongue and every part – would be fully satisfied. His body will go with him and he will not miss his heart. Heart is the seat of love and affection and there he will have no need of it.

Stanza Four

Well then, stay here ; but know,

When thou hast stay'd and done thy most,

A naked thinking heart, that makes no show,

Is to a woman but a kind of ghost.

How shall she know my heart ; or having none,

Know thee for one?

Practice may make her know some other part ;

But take my word, she doth not know a heart.

The poet, therefore, permits his heart to stay behind and continue with his love-making. But when it has done its utmost to win her over, then it would realize that for a woman, 'a naked thinking heart' like a ghost, is an object of fear rather than of love and affection. In other words, a woman requires sexual gratification and merely spiritual love cannot gratify her. A woman can never recognize a heart, because she herself has none. By experience, she may recognize other parts, but she can never recognize a heart. Therefore, the poet assures the heart that she would never realize that it is his heart and, therefore, it will be useless for it to say behind.

Stanza Five

Meet me in London, then,
Twenty days hence, and thou shalt see
Me fresher and more fat, by being with men,
Than if I had stay'd still with her and thee.
For God's sake, if you can, be you so too ;
I will give you
There to another friend, whom we shall find
As glad to have my body as my mind.

In this final stanza of '*The Blossom*', when the poet finds that the heart is obstinate and will remain behind, he asks it to meet him in London after twenty days. It will find that he has grown fresher and more fat

than he would have been had he stayed there. In London, he would give his heart to such friends as would be glad to have his body as well as his mind. True love relationship is both of the body and the spirit. It is only such a relationship that gives satisfaction.

Summary and Analysis

Introduction

The Blossom is probably addressed by [John Donne](#) to his patroness Mrs. M. Herbert. He had a great devotion to the lady because she had helped him in the hour of distress. The poet expresses the love in a Petrarchan manner and also criticizes the inadequacies of such a love. The charm of the poem lies in the dialogue between the poet and his heart, which wishes to stay behind with the beloved during the period of his visit abroad. There is a "certain tender playfulness or playful tenderness" in the poem showing that love consists in the union of the body and the mind. The poet plays with the usual Petrarchan images, i.e., blossom flower, heart, but the personal fidelity needs to be compensated with some vital and physical experience with the lady. While the lover is devoted and constant, the beloved is obviously cold and unresponsive. Donne would not be satisfied with a distant friendship. He would like to get closer to the lady. This Platonic love needs a physical base so as to be completely satisfying. The comparison of the beloved to the 'poor flower' is apt because it echoes the temporariness of beauty, youth and love. The blossom refers to the youth and the charm of the beloved. But this blossom will freeze and die and as such his love will not find fruition. The temporary absence of the lover from the beloved to enjoy his twenty days outside London may have a reference to Anne More, the poet's wife who shall accompany him on his tour and have both the poet's body and mind.

Summary

This poem has been addressed by the poet to his lady-friend Mrs. M. Herbert.

Stanza 1: O my poor flower, I have been watching your beauty for the last six or seven days. I have seen your beauty at your birth and it has continued to grow from day to day. Now you are cheerful like a beautiful flower in bloom on its stem. You do not realize that your beauty is transient. Your beauty will be destroyed like a flower by frost. Your beauty will decay like the petals of a full-grown flower.

Stanza 2: Oh my (poet's) heart, it is useless to go near the heart of the beloved in order to find a place in it. Her heart is like the "forbidden tree" because she (Mrs. Herbert) is the wife of another man and she is like a "forbidding tree because she has rejected my love. It is no use prolonging the siege by continuous love-persistence, because she is very stubborn. Tomorrow before my beloved (my sun) is awakened, I shall start my journey and my heart will go with me (The poet is to leave London and stay abroad for twenty days)."

Stanza 3: (The poet's heart now replies to him). The poet's heart tells him that if he (poet) goes away how does it make any difference to her. The heart will stay behind to continue its love-making. The poet may go and see his new friends who will provide him new joy. His physical senses would be perfectly satisfied in his new surroundings. His body will go with him, but not his heart, which stays behind.

Stanza 4: Let my heart stay here with her and continue love-making to my beloved. Even after it (heart) has put in its best efforts, it will not succeed in winning the love of my beloved. She will think of my 'thinking heart' as a ghost, as an object of fear rather than love. As she has no heart she will not be able to appreciate the devotion of my heart. Through experiences, she may recognize other parts of the body, but she cannot recognize my heart. As such, it will be useless for my heart to stay here with my beloved.

Stanza 5: As my heart is unwilling to go with me, let it meet me after twenty days when I return to London. My heart will on my return find that I have grown fresher and fatter by staying with my friends abroad. If it (heart) wants to be happy, I may be prepared to give it to another friend (some lady) who will be glad to have both my body and mind (The poet is willing to give his body and mind to a woman who enjoys the physical side of love).

Development of Thought:

The poet addresses his beloved, whom he has been watching and he is pleased with her development and growth for the last few days. She is now mature and looks proud and beautiful like a flower standing on its stalk. The poet calls her a 'poor flower' because her beauty is transient like that of a flower blasted by snow. After a short while, he will find her beauty decaying and her youth will come to an end like a flower which fades and falls to the ground.

Critical Analysis

The Blossom has a dramatic structure. There is a dialogue between the poet and his heart. The word 'Thou' has two meanings. The first 'Thou' refers to the beloved. The second 'Thou' refers to the poet's heart. Donne practices a sort of detachment, keeping the heart at a distance. The Petrarchan doting of the heart on the beloved is ridiculed by the poet. If at all the heart must stay back let it stay with a woman (the poet's wife) who welcomes both his body and his mind.

The use of imagery is skillful. Of course, there are the usual Petrarchan images – the poor flower, the bird in the nest, and the courtship like a siege of the "forbidden or forbidding tree" with its double meaning. Another interesting comparison is that of the heart to a ghost which will disturb the body. The pun on sun (beloved) and heart needs to be noted. On the whole, this poem has psychological interest and a dramatization of a piquant situation in the poet's life. Ultimately the conflict between the heart and the poet's self remains unresolved.

The Heart's Devotion:

The poet addresses his heart and declares that it is useless for the heart to pursue the beloved with affection. The lady will not make any favorable response to his heart because she is a "forbidden tree" a lady married to another man (Herbert). She is also the "forbidding tree"

because she has already discarded the advances of the poet. It is almost impossible to overcome her resistance by persistent persuasion. Tomorrow, the poet will start on his journey and his heart will accompany him. The heart replies that it will stay with the beloved, though the poet may go outside London. It will continue making love to the beloved. The poet will not miss his heart because his friend will provide him with physical satisfaction. His body will go with him and will have no need of the heart.

The Heart Stays Behind:

The poet allows his heart to stay with his beloved. He knows very well that the beloved will not be content with a simple heart - which is an object of fear like a ghost - but will require sure sexual satisfaction. A woman cannot appreciate a lovers heart because she has no heart. It will, therefore, be useless for his heart to stay behind. The poet asks the heart, therefore, to stay in London and meet him after twenty days. On his return, the heart would find that he has become fresher and fatter than before. He would prefer to leave his heart with friends who would want both his body and his mind. Perhaps he would like to leave his heart with his wife Anne More, The poet feels that true love relationship is both of the body and the mind