

William Blake's "The Fly" is a deceptively simple poem that with skill and ease examines the much larger, more complex fabric of our existence and how we customarily are blind to the commonalities between ourselves and nature. So common is the pedantic, cerebral examination of what's deemed lofty, even in an emotional enterprise such as poetry, that Blake's simplicity is refreshing. He sidesteps triviality by evoking a real, albeit emotional, response from the reader and by populating his twenty-lined poem with vivid imagery. The reader is immediately connected to their own mental portrait of a time and place at once unique and universal. He uses the metaphor of the fly, a small, seemingly insignificant creature, to illustrate our own insignificance when pinned against something as vast as the universe. Blake wisely shows restraint in avoiding clarification of his feelings about what the poem "means," but presents his subject as an observation, something someone might think in the midst of a picnic, letting the grandiose thought then slip out of their heads as they go back to concerning themselves with more *relevant* matters, like are there enough potato chips to go around. The brilliance of Blake in this poem in particular is his humility. He connects the reader to something deep, challenging and even upsetting, but presents it in a way that suggests this thought could have cropped up in the head of an inquisitive child. There's wonder and splendor and harsh truth all coexisting simultaneously as the poem works toward its revelation, its ending that ties the floating strings of suggestion into a cohesive knot of discovery. He poses a self-answering question within the poem, pushing further into ambiguity, allowing his audience to draw their own conclusion, respecting the intelligence of people, a concept that in today's art is clubbed into submission. A humanist can find endorsement in the poem as easily as a person of faith can find validation. In a way, Blake's "The Fly" feels like a proverb, a distilled truth that if embraced by more people could become a cliché. One can read it and think, "yes, of course," but the poem's implications can and do ripple far beyond someone's first impression, becoming the seed that sprung an enormous tree of wherewithal about our place and purpose in this existence.

Examining "The Fly" less from a philosophical perspective and more from a structural standpoint, there yet again is the simplicity inherent to the subject matter. Short lines create short stanzas. A straightforward rhyme scheme is implemented. It begins by addressing the fly itself, "Little Fly." Blake engages his subject, starting a conversation that will surely be one-sided. This is a construct common in philosophical writings, the personification of a non-human noun to function as a mirror for the writer to examine their distinctly human subject, in this case, the author's similarity to the Fly in relation to all life. There's also warmth and affection immediately established by using the descriptive "little." Since it's common knowledge that flies are small in comparison to a man, Blake's adjective provides insight into how he feels towards the fly. This is a crucial beginning as it does not only show Blake's command of language, but it also establishes the abstract, almost subliminal emotions required for the reader to accept a mindset where they're open to the idea of being connected to things they've spent their entire lives feeling separate from.

Going forward, the second, third and fourth lines read, "Thy summer's play," "My thoughtless hand" and "Has brush'd away." These three lines complete a thought and should be examined simultaneously. The second line establishes a place, time and attitude, all vital to creating a proper mindset for the reader. In the third line, the key phrase is "thoughtless." This implies regret at the author's dismissal of a creature he later acknowledges to be one in the same with himself. It not only foreshadows the rest of the poem, but sets up the uncommon perspective of the author which allows the realization within the poem to exist. Blake rightly observed that flies are brushed away by almost everyone who encounters them and their role in daily life is usually relegated to that of a nuisance. A fly's real purpose, however, is crucial to the survival of other creatures by the reappropriation of waste as food. The fly's relationship with the deceased and its ability to recycle dead materials into life-giving sustenance is significant and

sheds light on why a fly, out of all the other wonderful creatures of earth, was chosen to be Blake's companion in this poem. Knowing more about Blake himself and understanding that he was a critic of conventional religion reveals an assumed admiration for a creature that at first glance seems all but meaningless, but quite contrarily performs a function of importance. This idea itself mirrors humanist philosophies and attempts to reconcile similar paradoxes that arise when one values their existence but believes there is not a grander significance motivating their actions. The fly recycles dead tissue not as an altruistic act, but because that is its nature. A human has the advantage and disadvantage of having to consciously process its actions. Like the fly, people are products of their natures, and like the fly there is a cyclical *recycling*, but what people choose to recycle, most unsuccessfully, are attempts to overcome their nature.

The next stanza consists of four lines and poses two questions. "Am not I a fly like thee?" and "Or art not thou A man like me?" Both questions are a rewording of the other, which transcends redundancy by underlining the overarching theme of two different things being actually derivative of the same thing. This very choice, risking pedestrianism, has endless extrapolations to subjects as seemingly unconnected as physics, but yet again, all of that is left to the reader to explore. Blake goes for the heart, the simple twisting of words that continue their nursery-rhyme-styled structure. Here Blake also boldly and directly faces his theme, which is another example of contradictory duality. While effortlessly remaining inexact, he navigates his headier theme with a point-blank question. It seems almost too simple to be profound and therein lies its effectiveness. Almost somberly, innocently, Blake asks his fly, 'what separates us?' There is a subtextual melancholy, a malaise. Blake suggests that there is a subconscious longing for Man to comprehend his connectivity to the world and finally accept it graciously.

Blake goes on to examine himself in his next stanza, "For I dance And drink & sing; Till some blind hand Shall brush my wing." Blake's 'blind hand' is a concept different to each reader. Perhaps its God, perhaps its death, perhaps its Blake himself, stifling his potential by succumbing to human short-sightedness. While the poem provides evidence for all of those interpretations, all of them are equally plausible and equally bountiful. If God is real He holds the power to squash humans like bugs, and indeed He does. If it is death, it implies imminence. Blake will dance and drink and sing until he can no longer do so, as natural law dictates. This avenue yet again connects the author to the fly. Both creatures will die. The fly's life cycle is roughly only twenty-four hours, and with this, the fly becomes a microcosm of Blake's life, of all human life. The author watches the fly, for the first time engaged as opposed to indifferent. He sees more in common with this tangible fly than a silent, intangible God.

The following stanza gives credence to the idea that the 'blind hand' is possibly consciousness stifling our baser, perhaps purer, instincts; "if thought is life And strength & breath; And the want Of thought is death;" 'The want of Of thought,' the word *want* reflects our desires. We want answers, we want to know *why* we're here and that is in and of itself metaphorical 'death,' because while being preoccupied by an imaginary purpose, we fail to live with meaning. The fly does not concern itself with questions it can never find answers for, it doesn't even occur to the fly to question such things. But now the theme of duality is exemplified, for Blake condemns and champions humans' capacity for thought within the same stanza. He acknowledges that thought gives us life, strength and breath, he knows that despite being of the same cloth as the rest of nature, there is something profoundly special about being human. He yearns to appreciate humanity's gift without forgetting how fragile and temporary he is. Conscious thought has prompted delusions of grandeur among the human race, it is how justification is felt when stepping on a beetle or squashing a spider or swatting a fly.

'Acceptance' is a word that comes to mind while reading The Fly's last stanza: "Then am I A happy Fly, If I live, Or if I die." Finally, life and death both seem simultaneously arbitrary and meaningful. Blake is alive. That's what he knows. Everything else is a mystery, everything else

is a question, the answers to which are not relevant. Blake uses the word “happy,” staying true to his deceptive simplicity. Out of all the words he could have chosen, out of all the feelings conjured up by his little poem, he leaves the reader with a sense of happiness. He understands, as perhaps he hopes the reader will, that mindfulness and appreciation for the world with all its imperfections and shortcomings is the only way to find peace.