

Mosquito

John Updike (1932-2009)

On the fine wire of his whine he walked,
Unseen in the ominous bedroom dark.
A traitor to his camouflage, he talked
A thirsty blue streak distinct as a spark.

5 I was to him a fragrant lake of blood
From which he had to sip a drop or die,
A reservoir, a lavish field of food,
I lay awake, unconscious of my size.

10 We seemed fair-matched opponents. Soft he dropped
Down like an anchor on his thread of song.
His nose sank thankfully in; then I slapped
At the sting on my arm, cunning and strong.

15 A cunning and strong Gargantua, I struck
This lover pinned in the feast of my flesh
Lulled by my blood, relaxed, half-sated, stuck,
Engrossed in the gross rivers of myself.

20 Success! Without a cry the creature died,
Became a fleck of fluff upon the sheet.
The small welt of remorse subsides as side
By side we, murderer and murdered, sleep.

Understanding the Poem

1. Explain what the details in the poem reveal about the speaker, setting, occasion, conflict, and purpose of the poem.
2. What can we discover about the protagonist through both direct and indirect characterization? What motivates his actions and feelings?
3. Analyze any three of the similes and metaphors in the poem. Is there a pattern in the vehicles used? Are they appropriate to the purposes of the poem? How are the protagonist's feelings displayed through the choice of figurative language?
4. What tone is produced by the sound devices in the poem? Consider the uses and effect of rhyme, meter, metrical substitutions, enjambment, caesura, alliteration, assonance, and consonance, and choose one example of each to comment on. What is the overall effect of sound in the poem in relation to its meaning: is the sound primarily euphonious or cacophonous?

Thesis Blueprint

In [poet]'s poem [title of poem—in quotation marks], [literary devices] creates a [Choose a word from your tonal chart.] tone by [What is the purpose of a mock epic poem?].