

The Flea

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,
How little that which thou deny'st me is;
It sucked me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea, our two bloods mingled be;
Thou know'st that this cannot be said
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead;
Yet this enjoys before it woo,
And pampered swells with one blood made of two,
And this, alas, is more than we would do.

Oh stay; three lives in one flea spare,
Where we almost, yea more than married are.
This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;
Though parents grudge, and you, we' are met,
And cloistered in these living walls of jet.
Though use make you apt to kill me,
Let not to that, self-murder added be,
And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since
Purpled thy nail, in blood of innocence?
Wherein could this flea guilty be,
Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?
Yet thou triumph'st and say'st it hurt thee;
Find'st not thyself nor mine, he weaker now;
"Tis true; then learn how false he feels be,
Just so much honour, when thou yield'st to me,
Will waste, as this flea's death took life from
thee.

Form and Structure

- Rhyming couplets with rhyming triplets at the end of each stanza
- Iambic pentameter- regular rhyme and rhythm. This makes Donne's argument or seduction move convincing as the rhythm makes his point more prominent.
- Three stanzas referencing the holy trinity- religious imagery and connotations.
- Argument of seduction- he varies the argument to suit himself.
- It is split into three stanzas, each containing nine lines. This can be representative of the Elizabethan three act play, which would have been very much a part of Donne's life during the time the poem was written; the dramatic structure is also a feature of the metaphysical poets rather than being just narrative or descriptive. While most plays of this era would have been romances or tragedies, Donne immediately undermines tradition by the very subject matter of his poem, which is, in fact, sexual intercourse.
- The formal structure can also be seen to represent the structure Donne uses in his argument of seduction.