

# Literature review on john donnes the flea explication and response

[Religion](#), [God](#)



**Part 1 – Explication:**

O: Mark but this flea, and mark in this,

How little that which thou deniest me is;

I: Mark here means “ See” or “ Look at”. In this line, the poet brings attention of the reader to an insignificant flea. He relates the small size of the flea to the thing that his beloved has denied him, without knowing that the thing she has denied to him is very little.

**O: It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee,**

And in this flea our two bloods mingled be.

I: He tells that the flea sucked, after sucking his blood, is now sucking hers. He is strangely happy that their blood would join in the flea.

**O: Thou know'st that this cannot be said**

A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead;

I: In these lines, he says that there is no sin or shame in having blood mingled inside an insect. Similarly, there would be no shame in having sex. Now it is clear that she has denied him of sex.

**O: Yet this enjoys before it woo,**

And pamper'd swells with one blood made of two;

And this, alas! is more than we would do.

I: The poet is complaining that the flea gets to enjoy her without charming her and still gets to have more of her than he ever will.

**O: O stay, three lives in one flea spare,**

Where we almost, yea, more than married are.

I: Probably, his lover was about to kill the flea when he stopped her and told her not to kill it because in the flea, their blood which represents sex between them, which may never happen in the real life.

**O: This flea is you and I, and this**

Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is.

I: The poet carries his argument further by saying that flea is the temple in which their marriage is consummated.

O: Though parents grudge, and you, we're met,  
And cloister'd in these living walls of jet.

I: Here we get a clearer picture of their relationship. Her parents disapprove of this and have an objection to them meeting.

**O: Though use make you apt to kill me,**

Let not to that self-murder added be,

And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

I: Her the poet says that if she kills the flea, she would be committing three sins: suicide, murder and sacrilege. Murder and suicide because the flea has their blood in it and sacrilege of their marriage inside the flea.

**O: Cruel and sudden, hast thou since**

Purpled thy nail in blood of innocence?

I: She has seemingly killed the flea.

O: Wherein could this flea guilty be,

Except in that drop which it suck'd from thee?

I: Here, the poet argues upon the innocence of the flea by saying that all it did was take a drop of blood from her.

**O: Yet thou triumph'st, and say'st that thou**

Find'st not thyself nor me the weaker now.

I: Now that she has killed the flea, the poet says that she must feel that she has won both over the flea and over the poet's argument by saying that neither of them don't feel weaker, so killing the flea didn't have the murderous or suicidal effect.

**O: 'Tis true; then learn how false fears be;**

Just so much honour, when thou yield'st to me,

Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

I: The poet agrees that his previous argument that killing the flea would be a murder and suicide was wrong, but he goes on to say that just like killing the flea didn't kill them, having sex with him won't kill her honor. It will kill as much honor as killing the flea took life out of her, that is, none.

**Part 2 – Response:**

O: Mark but this flea, and mark in this,

How little that which thou deniest me is;

**R: What I have denied you is no little thing.**

O: It sucked me first, and now sucks thee,

And in this flea our two bloods mingled be;

R: What's your point?

O: Thou know'st that this cannot be said

A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead,

R: Yeah, so? But there isn't actual sex involved either.

O: Yet this enjoys before it woo,

**And pampered swells with one blood made of two,**

And this, alas, is more than we would do.

R: It's just a flea sucking on my blood. And if you do think that the flea is getting more action than you are, and since it didn't woo me, I'm going to kill it.

**O: Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,**

Where we almost, nay more than married are.

R: How are we married in the flea?

O: This flea is you and I, and this

**Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;**

R: Ahan.

O: Though parents grudge, and you, w'are met,

And cloistered in these living walls of jet.

R: This is not good, at all. Why are you so obsessed with flea so much? It's just a bug, not a symbol to our sex life.

O: Though use make you apt to kill me,

**Let not to that, self-murder added be,**

And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

R: What?! Really? This is no murder or suicide. If I kill the flea, I would be no

weaker. Here, I'll kill it and you'll see.

O: Cruel and sudden, hast thou since

### **Purpled thy nail, in blood of innocence?**

R: How is the flea innocent? It was sucking on my blood.

O: Wherein could this flea guilty be,

### **Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?**

R: Whatever. I won over the flea. Also, I don't feel any weaker.

### **O: Yet thou triumph'st, and say'st that thou**

Find'st not thy self, nor me the weaker now;

R: This shows that your argument wasn't true. I didn't commit a suicide or murder because both of us are still fine. No harm done.

### **O: 'Tis true; then learn how false, fears be:**

Just so much honor, when thou yield'st to me,

Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

R: I'm pretty sure it would take more hurt my honor more than killing an insect did. Why don't you understand? Killing an insect is no equal to having sex with you.

## **Part 3 – Holy Sonnet Fourteen and Relationship of Believer with God**

The relationship of a believer with God is similar to that of a child and parents. A believer believes that his God can protect him from the evils of the world and can help him get back on the right track when he goes astray.

He finds comfort and protection and believes that his God will always be there to guide him, just like parents are always there to guide their children to the right path, even if it means that they need to force them to do certain things and abstain from the certain other. The relationship between a believer and God is represented accurately in fourteenth holy sonnet of Donne where he asks God to forcefully make his heart bend towards the right path and acknowledges that there are still many things such as worldly desires, holding him back from giving himself fully to God.

In his fourteenth Holy Sonnet, Donne combines the two forms of sonnets: Petrarchan and Shakespearean. He starts with the Petrarchan form of the sonnets using abba abba form, but later switches to the Shakespearean form of sonnet with the rhyming couplets of the form cdcd cc towards the end of the sonnet. In this sonnet, Donne describes the relationship of a believer (himself) with God. Donne, in this sonnet, is found asking the God to batter his heart, referring to the fact that God needs to use force to make him a better person. Usually, people pray to God to let them answer to the God's knocking on their heart, but this seems to be too little for the poet. He knows that he is a sinful person who can't break free of the cycle of the sins without God's forceful help. Furthermore, he asks God to make him a better person by "force, to break, blow, burn" to help the poet stand and start anew. Here, it indicates that God needs to recreate him in order to help him become what he needs to be.

However, while there is a need in the believer's heart to be taken by God and help become a better person, there are also worldly desires involved with his/her life. A person is tied to the worldly desires and cannot abstain

from them, no matter how hard he tries. There is always one thing or the other that keeps one busy be it family, friends, job, education or lust of power, money or of body etc. Sometimes these things are not in a person's control as he owes his allegiance to those worldly things. This means that some things are a person's responsibility whether or not they like it. For example, one owes their allegiance to their family and the responsibilities that come with a family are always there and these responsibilities keep a person away from their God and busy in everyday life. This is the point raised by Donne in the second quatrain where he is frustrated that his reason, which is supposed to be " God's viceroy", is the very thing that keeps him from leaving his sins and pledge his life fully to the God. The reason keeps him tied to the worldly desires when it was supposed to help him come closer to God.

One of the important things in the relationship between a believer and God is the belief that only God can help the believer in getting rid of all the sinful desires and habits and guide him to the path of success. Donne acknowledges that he is married to the enemies of God (i. e. lust and desire etc) while seeking God's help in divorcing such evils from his life and breaking the knot of marriage between him and the worldly desires and evils that keep him from following the path that leads to God. In the last couplet of the sonnet, he also mentions the paradox of the faith by telling us that a believer can only set himself free of the worldly desires and evil if he is " enthralled" by God, but on the other hand, he can only be chaste on one condition: if the God " ravishes" the believer.

Done here uses conflicting ideas to show that holy God is and a sound



relationship with him needs more than just mere words. It needs battering your heart and being born again into a new and better person. A person who has given up on worldly desires and love of what is in store for the world to offer them is the one who can claim the bounties of being closer to God. Only then, one can have a sound relationship with God.

### **Part 4 – Poem:**

When the tides of world are fast,  
When nothing seems to go my way.  
When life is hard and peace is naught,  
When darkness leads me astray,  
I close my eyes and let you in  
I kneel in front of you to pray.

### **When I feel all alone in life**

And everyone leaves my way  
I know someone who's always there

### **Who won't let the darkness stay.**

I know you protect me from all that is bad

### **You keep the darkness at bay.**

I know you won't leave by my side  
I know that you would stay.