

'the flea' written by john donne

[Literature](#), [Poetry](#)



There are various types of love, when we talk about the term 'Love' many terms and phrases come in to our mind. The various types of love that exist are, Romantic, obsessive, sexual, true love and blind love etc. The basis of these kinds of love is based on immense feeling. The three love poems that I selected to study were, 'The Flea' written by John Donne in the seventeenth century. 'First Love' which was written by John Clare in the nineteenth century, and also 'Shall I compare thee...' which was written by William Shakespeare in the sixteenth century.

The kind of love that is address in 'The Flee' is obsessive and very sexual. In this poem he is trying to seduce his mistress in to having sex with him. The second poem is about the narrator who fell in love for the first time. Puppy love we can also say. The last poem is about summer, beauty which never ages. The narrator in this poem seems experienced in the aspect of love, well more experienced than the other poets.

The theme of love that is addressed in 'The Flea' is that of a sexual nature. The poet is very witty and clever also persuasive, the poet is trying to seduce his mistress into having sex with him. The poet is witty and persuasive because he had some experience of a lawyer in his early days. He tries using his witty and clever personality, we can see this from,

'How little that that which though dens'yt me'.

The quote states that she shouldn't deny their love, he uses the words 'little' making love sound less important, saying it's a minor thing, which shows he is persuading her.

John Donne was part of a group of poets called the metaphysical poets. We can see this as he symbolises the flea cleverly, symbolising their love as a simple yet effective 'flea'. The narrator uses the flea as a conceit, making the flea as an idea of love and expanding it through out the poem. Donne chose the flea as conceit because, he is almost like a flea, he is feeding off her love jus like flea's feed of their prays blood. Donne's natural intelligence allowed him to make a flea, something small and irrelevant to love, to something larger and more important.

As we progress through the poem we can see more persuasive language used,

'A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhood'.

The quote implies the witty character of the narrator once again, saying that there would be no shame and it wouldn't be a sin if she lost her virginity. The poet is trying to imply that virginity is a small aspect of life and love, something irrelevant. The tone that he uses is very intellectual and sharp, doing his up most to seduce his mistress, there is also a very tense sexual atmosphere,

'Alas is more than we would do....'

The quote portrays that the atmosphere was starting to get very sexual, because of the clever chosen words indicating the sexual nature.

As we progress through the poem, the narrator states,

'Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare'.

The quote indicates his persuasive nature once again, he is persuading her not to kill the flea because their blood is in the flea. He is saying in one way or the other they have had sex, so it would be no shame doing the real thing. Donne was also a religious man, we can see this from,

'Our marriage bed and marriage temple is,' also 'And sacrilege, 3 sins in killing 3'.

Which signify the author's religious nature because Dunne at one point of his life became a Dean of St Paul's for six years, when he refers to various religious terms such as 'sacrilege' and 'temple' we can see that he has got some background information on religion. Some poetic devices such as metaphors are also used,

'And cloistered in these living walls of jet'.

This shows he is comparing the flea with the inside walls of a church. This again shows some reference to his religious background. The author is also trying to persuade the woman into overcoming her personal moral issues with her parents, he says,

'Though parents grudge, and you, we're met'.

As we can see he is telling her to rebel against her parents, by disobeying them, even though that her parents would disapprove of it. At this point, I think the reader would have learnt a lot in verse two, he would've realised that even though Donne was witty and clever he also had a religious nature to his character.

In the third verse there is a sudden change in tone, we can tell this from the quote,

'Cruel and sudden, hast tough since....'

This shows that the narrator has changed his tone greatly, we can see this from the chosen words 'cruel' and 'sudden' which show the change in tone. From being Romantic, witty and persuasive to being forceful, aggressive and angry.

The poet said,

'Purpled thy nail, in blood of innocence, wherein the flea be guilty be'

Which signifies that the flea was innocent, she should not have killed it, saying that the 'Innocent', and wasn't the flea's fault. Now that the flea was killed by the woman, he cannot use it anymore as a conceit, love cannot be portrayed as a flea anymore.

Near at the end of the poem he starts to use his natural intelligence and persuasiveness again. We can tell this from,

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

This gives the impression of Donne trying one last time trying to persuade her into having sex. Signifying that even though she had killed the flea, it would be no harm in just having sex.

The First love was a romantic love poem written by John Clare in the nineteenth century. John Clare grew up in great poverty, and worked on farm

land since the age of seven. Even though he had little access to books, he did remember the folk ballads that were told to him. When he reached his middle ages his mental and physical health started to deteriorate. He ended his life in a mental asylum.

The poem that he wrote, *The First Love*, deals with the kind of love that we can say is puppy love. The poet has experienced this kind of love for the first time, we could tell this from,

'I ne'er was struck before that hour, with love so sudden and sweet'

This implies he is experiencing love for the first time. Some forms of similes are used to compare his love for the woman,

'Her face bloomed like a sweet flower'

This suggests that he is comparing her with a flower because when flowers glow when they bloom and he saying that the woman's face is 'glowing' just like it. He is describing her as if he has met the love of his life. The quote also showed the mood and the atmosphere, we can see it is romantic and that the narrator is passionate towards the woman. Even though love is affecting him mentally, it also starts to affect him physically, we can see this from,

'My face turned pale, as deadly pale, my legs refused to walk away.'

This shows that there are physical effects of love which are affecting him. He also described his face in detail, 'deadly pale' which added a depth of realism to the poem.

In verse two there is still a romantic atmosphere, we can see that there are more physical affects of what he is experiencing from the quote,

'And then blood rushed to my face'

This suggests that perhaps the narrator is starting to blush, this again is a physical reaction to love as we can see from the quote. From all of this so far we can tell that the poet rather innocent to say the least, where as in 'The Flea' the poet was far more witty, persuasive and clever. The poet also gives brief description of their surroundings,

'The trees and bushes round place'

This adds depth to the romantic atmosphere. There are various interesting phrases, for example,

'Seemed midnight at noonday'

This demonstrates that the poet is starting to get rather delusional or on the other hand it could be a metaphor, saying it was romantic. As I read in I noticed that there were very few references to the woman he loved, the poet focuses more on himself than the woman. Also the love that is expressed in this poem, we can emphasise that it is that of an unrequited nature, where one person likes someone and the other person doesn't.

In verse three he starts the verse with,

'Are flowers the winters choice? Is loves bed always snow...'

Which are rhetorical questions, he also refers back to the seasons, saying that could love be found in winter. As we can see the atmosphere is less romantic and starts to get far more depressive. He also realises that as hard as he tries, he will not get her, we can see this from,

'She seemed to hear my silent voice and loves appeal to know;

This suggests that due to social reasons and the hierarchy (he is poor and she is rich) it would be impossible for them to fall in love with each other. It is rather interesting in the last two lines where the poet states,

'My heart has left its dwelling place and can return no more'

Which is rather romantic and sentimental, he is saying that his heart left him for her. You can also notice that a poetical device such as personification is used, giving his heart human qualities. The rhyming tone in this poem is that of the following structure which is ABAB.

Overall I feel sympathetic towards the narrator, due to hierarchy and social status it would be impossible for his love to evolve from anything but a crush. I also think that love is rather frightening, due to the physical and emotional stress it put through the narrator.

The last poem I studied was called, 'Shall I compare thee' written by William Shakespeare in the sixteenth century. William Shakespeare wrote this poem as a sonnet (poem with 14 lines) which contains three quatrains and one couplet, when you look at the poem you can see that it is structured rather

well. The kind of love that is addressed in this poem is fairly romantic, we can tell this from the first line,

'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?'

This implies that he is talking about his lover in a romantic manner, because summer is usually associated with new beginnings and lovely weather. We can also see that the first line is a rhetorical question. This would also make the reader question himself, making him more interested, instead making him read on. As I read on Shakespeare actually starts to describe the woman,

'Thou art more lovely and more temperate'

This portrays to us what the author thinks of the woman. I can see that he thinks she is more beautiful than a summer's day. In the following lines,

'Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May and summer's lease hath all too short a date'

As we can see the poet is trying to indicate that even though summer has its beauty there are some bad points to summer. For example, he is saying even summer has wind, also pointing out that summer is too short.

Shakespeare quoted unpleasant things about summer on purpose so that the woman would seem to appear greater than summer.

Shakespeare uses many poetical devices such as personification, repetition etc. We can see this from the quote,

'And often is his gold complexion dim'd' also 'And every faire from faire some time declines.'

This gives the impression of Shakespeare as an imager, he seems to enjoy picturing the subject he is writing about. He also describes the woman as,

'Sommer shall not fade'

Which shows it is a metaphor, proving once again that he is an 'Imager' He likes writing about nature and seasons, we can see that these two themes must have inspired him to write the sonnet.

As we read on, we can see a rather interesting quote which reads,

'Nor shall death brag though wandr'st in his shade'

This demonstrates that the poet is getting quite foolish here, saying that she is so great that not even death would be able to conquer her. Which is obviously a false statement, everyone will die one day, and death is a thing that all people will have to face in their life. He also gave death human characteristics' saying that it would, 'Brag' which shows use of personification once again. The rhyme scheme is repeated eg ABBC between the quatrains. The iambic pentameter makes the poem very steady, easy flowing and even. There are ten syllables per line.

As we approach the end of the poem, Shakespeare ends it in a brilliant manner, saying,

'So long as men breathe or eyes can see, so long lives this gives life 2 thee'

This tells the reader that as long as the poem lives, it will give life her beauty. Making the poem and her beauty ever lasting.

I think when Shakespeare wrote the poem he seemed experienced in love, he doesn't sound desperate as the other poets, and I think that the poem gave the impression that he was experiencing true love.

In conclusion there are many differences and similarities between the three poems that I had studied. They were quite similar in many ways. For example the poets in the flea and first love seem to sound quite desperate in one way or the other, these two narrators approach to love is far more different than that of the Shakespeare who wrote shall I compare thee. Shakespeare in this poem seemed to appear less desperate, almost as if he had found his true love.

Also the English that is used in Donne's poem and Shakespeare poem is far more similar than that of Clare's poem. Maybe because Donne's poem and Shakespeare's were written during the same time period, whereas Clare's poem was written during the nineteenth century. There is another similarity, this is that both Shakespeare's and Clare's poem refer back to nature whereas Donne doesn't. These two poets also use rhetorical questions, which added affect to the poems. The rhyming scheme of Donne's poem and Clare's poem is very similar, that of the ABAB structure.

Shakespeare poem is very unique, this is because of the format it is written (which is a sonnet) the rhyming structure and the iambic pentameter. This keeps the poem steady, easy and flowing evenly with five strong beats. First

love is also very different from other poems. The poet in this poem mentions hierarchy and social status. He is also falling in love for the first time, these points make it different from other poems. The flea is also a unique poem, because the kind of romance that is shown in this poem was far more sensual, and persuasive when compared to other poems. He also used the flea as a conceit, portraying his love as a small, blood sucking insect. But his love was small, and he was feeding of her love.

Overall I think that Shakespeare's poem was superior at addressing the theme of love when compared to Donne's poem and Clare's poem. I think that he was better at this because of the way he structured his poem. Also when he referred back to the seasons, which added to the depth and atmosphere to the romantic poem. When he referred to summer he made, summer seem less significant than the woman. This highlighted his feelings of what he thought of the woman. He also used many poetical devices such as personification, repetition and metaphors. Due to the use of various poetical devices we could call him an imager.