

By this how little that  
which thou deniest



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

By referring closely to 'Elegy XIX: To His Mistress going to Bed' and 'The Flea' and making use of relevant external contextual information on metaphysical poetry, examine the poetic methods which Donne uses to write about sexual relationships with women. Donne uses a variety of poetic methods in 'The Flea' and 'Elegy XIX: To His Mistress going to Bed' to show his desires of a physical intimacy with the woman. These poems share a common theme of seduction and are written with the idea that the female is, to a degree, attainable, although it can be argued that she progressively becomes attainable.

Donne makes use of many poetic metaphysical characteristics present in both poems through the structure of stanzas, the focus on the physical rather than the spiritual, use of conceits, imperatives and wit. Mainly in 'Elegy XIX: To His Mistress going to Bed', there are references to the time period of the metaphysical poets such as exploration and the Ptolemaic theory. Although the poems are alike, it is apparent that 'The Flea' is much more of an erotic joke intended to be shared with Donne's male friends rather than a sensual and passionate poem as seen in, 'Elegy XIX: To His Mistress going to Bed'.

'The Flea' is a dramatic monologue that directly addresses the reader and is divided into three stanzas. Metaphysical poets were known for their vitality and drama which can be seen as the argument develops throughout the poem. It is also known that in drama there were two other 'actors' aside from the poet, which in this poem are the flea and the lady. There is juxtaposition between the flea and the woman as the flea is a disgusting

insect that carries the plague which contrasts with the beautiful woman in which Donne wants to seduce.

The first stanza discusses the flea and how it is small and of little importance just as the woman's virginity is, ' Mark but this flea, and mark in this/How little that which thou deniest me is'. Although the poem was intended for male eyes, in the poem Donne is trying to woo the woman into bed in an intelligent and humorous way. Therefore, Donne furthers his argument by saying that the flea has united them both through biting them and taking their blood so now ' our two bloods mingled be'. This idea is the conceit in the poem.

There is a metaphysical belief that during sexual intercourse, the blood of the two people's bodies mixed and mingled together, thus it is clear Donne is saying that the flea has taken her virginity and not only that, but as their blood is mixed in the flea and she hasn't changed, ' A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead', then there is no difference between that and actual sex. Donne shows his jealousy of the flea, ' Yet this enjoys before it woo', and how it didn't have to go to any effort to woo her. In the last line of the first stanza, Donne exclaims ' alas!

Is more than we would do', showing his disappointment that they have not yet had sexual intercourse. In the second stanza of ' The Flea', Donne makes use of imperatives such as ' O stay' which is a common trait in metaphysical poetry as it is know for its description of movement and actions. Donne is trying to persuade his mistress not to kill the flea as it is symbolic of them

both. Therefore, if the woman kills the flea, it will result in 'three sins in killing three' with the murder, suicide and sacrilege.

Again, Donne works with the conceit of their unity within the flea and how it is their 'marriage bed' and 'marriage temple'. Between the second and third stanzas, the woman has killed the flea and Donne heightens the drama with his use of hyperboles such as calling her 'cruel' and claiming she has 'Purpled thy nail in blood of innocence'. As in the first stanza, Donne makes use of another analogy claiming that any loss of honour due to sex or marriage with him is about as insignificant as the flea's death, 'Just so much honour, when thou yield'st to me,/Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee'.

The poem has been written with an irregular metre that alternates between iambic tetrameter and iambic pentameter which breaks down at the end to finish the stanza with a sense of completion, neatness and conciseness which was a feature of metaphysical poetry. Again in 'Elegy XIX: To His Mistress going to Bed', Donne has stuck within the metaphysical conventions of poetry through writing the poem as a dramatic monologue which directly addresses the mistress. In this poem, the lady is near and becomes very attainable which would be a break from Petrarchan poetry where the mistress was unattainable and distant.

The couple are in the bedroom with a natural intimacy in the way he talks to her with a conversational address. The first stanza places a lot of emphasis on the physical where he describes the female using words such as 'breastplate', 'girdle' and 'wiry coronet'. Donne also makes use of poetic

methods such as body puns which was unconventional, 'The foe oft-times having the foe in sight/Is tired with standing though he never fight' which is an innuendo referring to arousal of the poet wanting his mistress to go to bed with him.

The metaphor of the two 'foes' fits nicely with the female's clothing such as 'spangled breastplate' showing how she is protective and almost shielding her body from him and 'th' eyes of busy fools'. This poem contrasts with 'The Flea' as there is nothing standing in their way. The poem holds no humorous form except maybe in Donne mocking the amount of clothing she has to take off, but overall the poem is in a serious tone where Donne is confident that he will be able to woo his mistress into bed with him.

Donne uses metaphors to describe the outstanding beauty that lies beneath the clothing, 'flowry meads th' hills shadow steals' meaning that whenever the shadows lift from the hills it undresses them and reveals the real beauty. It can be thought that this 'natural' beauty is because the undressing of the woman is referring to her soul being revealed. Donne speaks of the woman as though she is an angel, 'In such white robes, heaven's angels used to be/Received by men; thou, Angel'. Donne refers to her hair as a 'diadem' as though she has some sovereign power over him.

This contrasts with Donne's use of the possessive pronoun throughout the poem, 'O my America!', 'My kingdom' and 'My mine of precious stones'. The metaphoric reference to exploration during this time is present in throughout the poem in a metaphorical way of claiming he wants to explore her body with his 'roving hands' as though it is a new found continent. This

makes the poem very explicit, unlike 'The Flea', and Donne makes short reference to America and 'new-found-land'. It is made clear that Donne wants fidelity from her as he says 'when one man manned'.

There is use of a double entendre in the line 'mine of precious stones' as it can be seen as she is in his possession and also a mine of 'precious stones'. The 'precious' also shows that she is the world and richness in her are in all of his joys. The poet uses the legend of Atlanta to explain the distraction that her jewellery has on men. He believes that jewellery misdirects men by making them covet gems instead of focusing on what is beneath them, 'when a fool's eye lighteth on a gem,/His earthly soul may covet theirs, not them'.

There is a sense of irony at the end of the poem where he ends up naked instead of her. The poem finishes with a rhetorical question, 'To teach thee, I am naked first; why than,/ what needst thou have more covering than a man?' which lightens the mood. It is unclear whether this poem is about Donne and his wife or Donne when he was a young man in the towns enjoying freedom and sexual fulfilment which contrasts with 'The Flea' as it is known that the poet and his mistress are not married.

The poem was written in iambic pentameter with frequent use of enjambment and rhyming couplets, which helps the poem flow as he pleads with his mistress for sexual fulfilment. These two poems both show Donne's wide variety of poetic methods that he uses to show his ways of wooing a lady into bed with him. The use of conceits, imperatives, metaphors, rhetorical questions and many more portray this message with ease.