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The Flea- John Donne

The situation described in the poem is the narrator trying to persuade his girlfriend to sleep with him. Bearing in mind the social context of the poem, the girl is going to need quite a lot of persuading. This is where the flea comes in. The idea of sex being like a flea is mentioned throughout the poem thus making it a sustained metaphor.

In the sixteen hundreds, fleas were just a common fact of life. Everybody had them, even rich people. I think it is quite a clever persuasive device to compare something that was such a huge thing in those days, to something which is just a part of everyday life that everyone had to deal with. This tries to lessen the situation the girl sees as being so important thus persuading her to sleep with her boyfriend. The flea is an unusual participant of a love poem but bearing in mind the context and content of the poem it seems quite suitable. I think the narrator sees the process of the flea jumping from his body to the body of his girlfriend and mingling both of their blood as being quite romantic. In those days people believed that babies were conceived through the mingling of blood so the fact that the flea has both of their blood gives the impression that the flea has done more with the girl than her boyfriend has.

The flea plays quite a substantial role in the first stanza as the narrator tells us why the poem is linked to a flea. He tries to persuade his girlfriend that the flea has taken both of their blood which, in the sixteenth century views is equal to having sex and their "two blood mingled be". When the narrator compares a flea sucking his girlfriend's blood to having sex he uses phrases like "how little", this minimises the situation. He tells her that if she is not ashamed of having fleas sucking her blood, she should not be ashamed of having sex because there is no "shame, nor loss of maidenhead", which is a complete lie because she would obviously lose her "maidenhead" if she were to sleep with him. The narrator tries to make the girl feel sorry for him by pontificating about how the flea gets more sexual pleasure out of the girl than he does; "and pumped' d swells with one blood made two, and alas, is more than we would do".

In line one of stanza two the poet tries to implore his mistress to refrain from killing the flea. He is slightly mocking her when he says "three lives in one flea space" which means he is asking her to spare the life of the flea which contain both of their blood. He then goes on to persuade her that they are practically married so they might as well have

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