

Main Text

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The Flea

- MARKE but this flea, and marke in this,
 How little that which thou deny'st me is;
 Mee it suck'd first, and now sucks thee,
 And in this flea, our two bloods mingled bee;
 5 Confesse it, this cannot: be said
 A sinne, or shame, or losse of maidenhead,
 Yet this enjoys before it wooe,
 And pamper'd swells with one blood made of two,
 And this, alas, is more then wee would doe.
- 10 Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
 Where wee almost, nay more then maryed are:
 This flea is you and I, and this
 Our mariage bed, and mariage temple is;
 Though parents grudge, and you, w'are met,
 15 And cloysterd in these living walls of Jet.
 Though use make thee apt to kill mee,
 Let not to this, selfe murder added bee,
 And sacrilege, three sinnes in killing three.
- Cruell and sodaine, hast thou since
 20 Purpled thy naile, in blood of innocence?
 In what could this flea guilty bee,
 Except in that drop which it suckt from thee?
 Yet thou triumph'st, and saist that thou
 Find'st not thy selfe, nor mee the weaker now;
 25 'Tis true, then learne how false, feares bee;
 Just so much honor, when thou yeeld'st to mee,
 Will wast, as this flea's death tooke life from thee.

The Flea. *JC* omits. Title from 1633, Σ no title H 40, L 74, *TC*, A 25.

3 Mee it suck'd H 40, L 74, *TC*, HK 2, *Cy*, P, A 25, B, Σ : It suck'd me 1633, C 57, H 49, Dob, QF, S 96, *Gr*

1. 3. *Mee it suck'd first*. The inversion throws the stress where it is needed, on the two personal pronouns.

1. 4. *our two bloods mingled bee*. Cf. 'To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods' (*Winters Tale*, I. ii. 109). In Aristotelian physiology coition was thought to be a 'mingling of bloods'; see *De Generatione Animalium*, and cf. 'The Progress of the Soul', stanza L.

5 Confesse it, Σ : Confesse that A 25: Thou know'st that 1633, C 57, H 49, *Gr*: Confess it: thou know'st that Cy

6 or ... or Σ : nor ... nor 1633, C 57, H 49, *Gr*
 shame,] shame 1633

11 nay Σ : yea 1633, C 57, H 49, *Gr*
 are:] are. 1633

14. and you, w'are met] and you yet we are Dob, QF, S 96, Cy, B: yett we are P

16 thee Σ you 1633, C 57, H 49, *Gr*

1. 16. *thee*. The reversion to the familiar singular pronoun marks a change from the pleading and respectful tone of the opening of the second stanza, marked by the change to the plural form. 'Thee' also gives an effective internal rhyme.

17 this Σ : thie L 74, *TC*: that 1633, C 57, H 49, *Gr*

21 In what Σ : Wherein 1633, C 57, H 49, *Gr*