The Critical Analysis Of “The Flea” By John Donne

The 17th century noted a shift from an age of belief to an age of reason. Literature represents an evolution in society, religion and the realm of this period. Life of the people of Britain reformed as religious hullabaloo and civil war shook the nation. These affairs reformulated the role of individuals in society, perspectives of faith and social construction in England. Writers of this period offer their own philosophies as resilient of the issues and affected the masses. Particular examples of authors of this era who extant Britain issues and perceptions in their works are John Donne and John Milton.

John Donne was an English poet and cleric in the church of England. He was the third of six children. His father was of Welsh Descent and a supervisor of the Ironmongers Company in London. However, he avoided unsolicited government courtesy out of the dread of persecution.

Donne was homeschooled however, there is no evidence to support the prevalent claim that he was taught by Jesuits. When he was eleven, he began his studies at Hart Hall. After studying there for 3 years, he enrolled in the University of Cambridge where he studied for three more years. However unfortunately, he couldn’t acquire a degree from either of the institutes due to his Catholicism.

During and after his schooling, Donne spent most of his generous heritage on women, literature, pursuits and travel. When he turned 25, he was well equipped for the diplomatic career he was interested in. Moreover, he was selected as head commissioner to the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal.

The name “Metaphysical Poetry” was first introduced by Samuel Johnson, the known poet. It is the kind of poetry which deals and discusses the idea of existence but to summarize and in easy words, it mainly talks about the relation between the physical and the spiritual world. Metaphysical poetry is greatly debatable mostly because of the intelligence of the poets. Poems like these demand a lot of concentration and focus to be able to understand and interpret correctly. The Metaphysical poets are known as the poets with the most originality out of all other poets.

In metaphysical poetry, if anyone’s name stands tall and strong even today, it is John Donne’s. Everyone treasured the authority of Donne in metaphysical poetry. He was the one who introduced a unique kind of poetry when everyone else was just following the tradition. Metaphysics isn’t the only aspect that makes his poetry extraordinary. There are other various elements in his poetry that makes John Donne stand out among other poets of his era.

“The Flea” is an erotic metaphysical poem which is an unusual love poem where the poet uses the flea to divulge his sensual interest with his mistress. The poem starts with the man trying to gain attention of his beloved. He applies the word “mark”, which is used to convey something very valuable. He signifies the flea and by incorporating it’s act of sucking their blood, tries to show how foolish her deprivation is. The insect has relished their blood and is neither a sin nor a dishonor, thus he questions the idea of the beloved about her rejecting his advancements. The man differentiates the sucking of the blood and their intermingling the insects’ body to the

sexual meetings of mortality.

The insect has savored the taste of both and is filled with pleasure, whereas he declares that it's not a disgrace to lose maidenhead. However, it's a measly act than the one performed by the flea as it could combine their blood for its pleasure. Donne represents the insect and gives it pleasure and gratification, while homicidal insects drink blood to endure.

The revelation of the authenticity of the fact that the insect has certainly united their blood is not liked by the woman and she attempt to kill it. The man attributes holiness by linking it with their marriage temple. The process of mingling three bloods also implies the Christian conception of three lives that exist in an individual, demonstrating that they have surpassed humanly conditions of ritual, devotion, constraint, etc. They are safely together within the walls of the flea. He then tries to convince her to not kill the flea as it would mean taking three lives.

This man excels in alluring his female conquests with his wit and sharpness. His dispute that the woman should surrender sexually to him twists and turns in answer to her concealed trial. He states primarily that the flea signifies the tiny honorable decision facing her and then swiftly adopts a less teasing tone. Thus, the flea does in fact represent the great holiness of their sexual convention. When the woman startles him by killing the flea, its triviality is the indication for the final twirl of his dispute. Yet again, using the initiative of snobbery, he describes in an extremely metaphysical approach, the chemistry they have with each other using the flea as a core that is holding their lives in it. He then goes on perusing her, showing the flea as their marriage bed and temple in which, nothing is immoral. He hopes that she would get the clarity if he uses it as a metaphor, but she doesn't feel guilty nor does she think it's a sin.

Donne has used symbolism greatly in the poem. Throughout the poem, he used the flea as a symbol of their togetherness and expands on it being their marriage bed. He refers to the symbolism of the Holy Trinity when he mentions about three things in one body. One of the most compelling modes of symbolism he has used in the poem is "blood", specifically in the last stanza.

Blood signifies life and Donne has used it to convey erotic, infatuation and spiritual dedication. Ignoring him, at last she crushes the flea under her fingernail, not noticing or paying attention to his advances towards her. Earlier on he had mentioned both their bloods being present in the flea's body, showing that they are one soul. He reproves her asks her about what the sin was, that the flea committed except that it just took from them a little blood. The role of the woman here in this poem is worth a mention. Her objections are never noted, just given an answer to. She makes a really strong yet non-verbal reference by crushing and murdering the flea. In a very captivating manner, the readers can see the conceits in which he primarily shows the flea being superior than the church, the spiritual connection between a man and a woman and firmly showing the church and the divine being is greater than just a mere flea. He then faces the realization that she has not fallen for his words and thus he changes his tactic and dispute therein. He moves his conceit forward, now giving her no excuse or motive of any kind to not make love to him, he argues that taking the flea's life was an effortless thing to do as she says it does not affect them or their relationship.

To summarize, this work is a metaphysical play with words in which there are themes such as religious metaphors and mischievous scenery are being shown. Donne has utilized words which point to the celestial aspects of living in that age which reveal more than one perspective about

what he is essentially trying to say.

As readers, we think of something so small being shown to have such importance to the author’s argument. John Donne is giving a message to whoever reads the poem that he would want to make love to his beloved and that its not a sin in any way, giving Donne a chance to end by saying that her fear had gone to waste.

To conclude, the poem uses a lot of spiritual imagery as it supports and helps to make an addition of the aspect of authority to the poem as Donne argued that what they were doing was supported by religion and God both. The process of rhythmical conceit was used in an extremely creative way to broaden the flea to have many different meanings and more color and humor to it. Donne is the first one to show a small thing like a flea portray such a big and important part in his poem. By mentioning the flea, he gives the readers a chance to go in depth about feelings and emotions and while most people would think that the flea doesn’t hold that much importance, he proves all such claims and thoughts wrong as this poem would be incomplete and like any other poem of that era without the flea. Most people do find it hard not to laugh on this poem at a certain point since not many of them would think that someone would portray a flea to be like this nor would anyone have ever thought about the flea sucking their blood and their bloods being combined into one inside its body. For this and other significant reasons, John Donne is well known for what he wrote and in the unique way that he did.