

of the state to whom he respectfully defers. He is a veritable impostor.\*\* His table abounds with cheeses, ham, bacon, butter, all produced by the first farmer. The situation repeats itself throughout history, for history has never lacked for political parasites. History is full of them, or maybe is made solely of them. Dinner is served among the parasites.

[...]

To parasite means to eat next to. Let us begin with this literal meaning. The country rat is invited by his colleague from town, who offers him supper. One would think that what is essential is their relation of resemblance or difference. But that is not enough; it never was. The relation of the guest is no longer simple. Giving or receiving, on the rug or on the tablecloth, goes through a black box. I don't know what happens there but it functions like an automatic corrector. There is no exchange, nor will there be one. Abuse appears before use. Gifted in some fashion, the one eating next to, soon eating at the expense of, always eats the same thing, the host, and this eternal host gives over and over, constantly till he breaks, even till death, drugged, enchanted, fascinated. The host is not prey, for he offers and continues to give. Not a prey, but the host. The other one is not a predator but a parasite. Would you say that a mother's breast is the child's prey? It is more or less the child's home. But this relation is of the simplest sort; there is none simpler or easier: it always goes in the same direction. The same one is the host: the same one takes and eats; there is no change of direction. This is true of all beings. Of lice and men.

\*\* The word imposteur means both "tax collector" and "impostor."—Trans.

## THE FLEA

(1633)

John Donne

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,  
How little that which thou deniest me is;  
It sucked me first, and now sucks thee,  
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be;  
Thou know'st that this cannot be said  
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead,  
Yet this enjoys before it woo,  
And pampered swells with one blood made of two,  
And this, alas, is more than we would do.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,  
Where we almost, nay more than married are.  
This flea is you and I, and this  
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;  
Though parents grudge, and you, w'are met,  
And cloistered in these living walls of jet.  
Though use make you apt to kill me,  
Let not to that, self-murder added be,  
And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since  
Purpled thy nail, in blood of innocence?  
Wherein could this flea guilty be,  
Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?  
Yet thou triumph'st, and say'st that thou  
Find'st not thy self, nor me the weaker now;  
'Tis true; then learn how false, fears be:  
Just so much honor, when thou yield'st to me,  
Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.