The speakers in “The Flea” and “To His Coy Mistress” share the same goal: they are trying to persuade a woman to have sex with them. Both refer to the woman’s virginity (“loss of maidenhead” in “Flea,” “that long-preserved virginity” in “Coy”). The two poems also use some rather graphic imagery. “The Flea” uses a flea throughout the poem, noting that it has more access to the woman’s body than the speaker does, and drawing a comparison between having their blood joined together inside the flea and being joined together in marriage or sex. The imagery in “Coy” is more varied, but includes similar unpleasant creatures such as worms, which will have access to the woman’s body after she is dead. Still, the basic argument is different. Marvell’s speaker employs the “carpe diem” theme: the woman should say yes while she has the chance. Time is moving quickly (in a “winged chariot”); someday she will be dead and have only the worms to sleep with. (And wouldn’t having sex with him now be more fun?) Donne’s speaker, on the other hand, does not suggest that time is running out, but rather that what he is proposing is not a big deal. It’s just like being bitten by the flea, which has already happened and didn’t really do any harm: “thou / Find’st not thy self nor me the weaker now.”

Both Astrophil & Stella #9 and Shakespeare’s Sonnet 130 are sonnets coming out of the sixteenth-century sonnet tradition, and both describe the physical appearance of the beloved woman. They are more different than alike, however. Sidney’s sonnet is Italian in form, while Shakespeare’s is English. Both use nature imagery to compare the woman’s beauty to, but for Sidney these comparisons really reflect what Stella looks like: her teeth are like pearls, her cheeks are marble, her hair is gold. For Shakespeare, such comparisons don’t work: his beloved’s hair is black, not gold; her cheeks are not like roses, etc. He emphasizes her imperfection, where Sidney suggests perfection. But both speakers end with testimony to their devotion. Astrophil is helplessly drawn to Stella’s eyes, like a piece of straw pulled toward the “touch,” a stone with an electrostatic charge, and Shakespeare’s speaker “thinks [his] love as rare as,” well, Stella herself. Both speakers admire the woman they love, but use different approaches to convey their admiration.