The Sun Rising

POEM TEXT

Busy old fool, unruly sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains call on us?
Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?
Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
Late school boys and sour prentices,
Go tell court huntsmen that the king will ride,
Call country ants to harvest offices,
Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

Thy beams, so reverend and strong
Why shouldst thou think?
I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,
But that I would not lose her sight so long;
If her eyes have not blinded thine,
Look, and tomorrow late, tell me,
Whether both th' Indias of spice and mine
Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with me.
Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,
And thou shalt hear, All here in one bed lay.

She's all states, and all princes, I,
Nothing else is.
Princes do but play us; compared to this,
All honor's mimic, all wealth alchemy.
Thou, sun, art half as happy as we,
In that the world's contracted thus.
Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
To warm the world, that's done in warming us.
Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;
This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere.

SUMMARY

Hey sun, you old, disruptive busybody, why are you shining past the windows and closed curtains to pay an uninvited visit to me and my girlfriend? Do lovers really have to structure their schedules around your movements across the sky? You rude, inflexible, and insensitive jerk, go scold boys who are late to school and apprentices who are sulky about their early morning. Go tell the king's hunting party that the king is about to ride out on a hunt, and urge lowly farm workers to start their harvesting duties. Love, in all its forms, is above the influence of seasons and weather. It is also above the influence of hours, days, and months, which, unlike love, wear out like old rags as time passes.

Why should you think your beams are so worshipped and strong? I could block them out by closing my eyes, except that I wouldn't want to stop looking at my lover that long. Assuming that her eyes aren't so bright that they've blinded yours, go check, and tomorrow evening tell me whether both the East Indies and West Indies are where you left them, or whether they are right here next to me. Ask to see the kings you saw yesterday, and you will hear that they are all lying here in this bed.

My lover is every country, and I am every prince. Nothing else exists. Princes only pretend to be us; compared to our love, all honor is a cheap copy, and all wealth is a futile attempt to attain riches. You, sun, should be half as glad as we are that the whole world fits here in the bedroom. Your old age demands that you take it easy. Because your job is to keep the world warm, you can do your job by keeping us warm. By shining here on us, you can shine everywhere; this bed is your center, and the bedroom walls are the outside boundaries of the solar system.

THEMES

THE AUTHORITY OF LOVE

In "The Sun Rising," the speaker wants to bend the rules of the universe. Rather than allowing the sun's "motions" across the sky to govern the way the speaker spends his time, the speaker challenges the sun's authority and claims that love gives him (the speaker) the power to stay in bed all day with his lover. In this way, the poem elevates the importance and power of love above work, duty, and even the natural rhythms of the day itself.

From the start the speaker talks down to the sun, robbing it of the authority it presumes to have when it shines "through windows, and through curtains" upon lovers in the morning. In the first line, the sun appears as a "busy old fool" and "unruly." This language suggests that not only is the sun foolish, but also that it ought to be "ruled" by some greater authority that it's failing to heed.

Although the speaker concedes that the sun is free to rule over "late school boys" (as well as several other parties for whom the speaker seems to have little respect), he claims that all *he* would have to do to "eclipse and cloud" the sun would be to close his

eyes. The ease of this action demonstrates that the sun is indeed "foolish" to think that its beams are "reverend and strong" in the face of a lover. By the third stanza, the speaker is not only giving the sun orders to annoy others instead of him and his lover, but he's also ordering the sun to actually *serve* the lovers by warming them in their bed. The lovers thus become the greater authority that the sun itself ought to obey.

By asserting *himself* as the ruler of the sun, the speaker claims the authority to indefinitely extend the dawn so that he can stay with his lover. The speaker asks the sun early on, "Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?" This rhetorical question suggests that the speaker wants lovers' "seasons" to be exempt from the daily rhythms dictated by the rising of the sun. The speaker goes on to distinguish love as unfamiliar with "the rags of time," suggesting that love is everlasting and therefore not subject to the starts and stops of "hours, days, months," and other temporal units that govern the lives of "school boys," "horsemen," and "country ants." Time, including the rising and setting sun, works differently for lovers than for anyone else.

By the end of the poem, the speaker has "contracted" the entire world to the bed, so that the sun's job is to "warm" there. Whereas most people must leave their beds during the day in order to accomplish their jobs, the speaker's insistence that love is the most important occupation anyone could have makes the bed into a sort of daytime workplace. What's more, that workplace is so important that the sun must drop what it is doing everywhere else in order to make the "work" of the bedroom possible.

The way the speaker reverses power in the poem doesn't simply make the sun into a servant of the speaker: the speaker diverts the sun from *everyone else*, demanding that it shine only on him and his lover. In this way, the speaker puts the rest of the world's productivity on hold. Instead of seizing the day by jumping out of bed, he is seizing everyone else's day for himself.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-14
- Lines 25-30

LOVE AS A MICROCOSM OF THE UNIVERSE

Like much of Donne's poetry, "The Sun Rising" uses metaphor to pack the entire world into a small space. This technique is grounded in the idea of a "microcosm," a popular Renaissance belief that the human body was a small-scale model of the whole universe. In the case of "The Sun Rising," the small space is not a single body but rather the lovers' bed. The speaker claims that "to warm the world" is the same thing as "warming us," transforming himself into a kind of king of the world and the center of the universe. In fact, love in the poem is so grand that the universe itself exists *within* the relationship between the two lovers.

The speaker uses extended metaphor not only to compare his bed to an empire but also to annex (that is, to take in) all of the world's empires into his own bed. In so doing, he collapses the expansive world into the space of his bedroom. In the second stanza, the speaker demands of the sun to look for "both th' Indias of spice and mine" in the place where they were last located. (The "Indias" referenced are the East Indies and the West Indies, both of which had been colonized by European nations by the time Donne was writing.) The speaker goes on to claim that these peripheral sources of imperial wealth and power now "lie here with me," meaning that they have been incorporated into the body of the speaker's lover.

The speaker goes on to claim that the kings of the empires that extend into the East and West Indies "All here in one bed lay." The speaker doesn't mean that the bed is *literally* full of kings. Rather, this line suggests that the kings and the power they represent have all been incorporated into the body of the speaker. As the kings conquer more nations in an effort to expand their empires, these far-ranging empires are simply relocated to and consolidated in the lovers' bed. Because the speaker's lover is figured as "all states" and the speaker himself is figured as "all princes," the world outside the bedroom falls away. The speaker is able to claim that "Nothing else is," meaning that the relationship between the two lovers is *all that matters* (or, that this relationship is so expansive that it contains the entire universe within it).

The speaker's transformation of himself into the rightful heir to all the world's thrones gives him greater sovereignty (ruling power) than any individual ruler has. By turning the bed into a microcosm, then, the speaker is able to inflate his own importance so that his orders to the sun are justified rather than insubordinate (unlike the sun, the speaker isn't "unruly").

Although the "court huntsmen" of the first stanza serve the king—who can decide whether or not to ride on any given day—the king still must time his rides according to daylight and weather patterns. The speaker, meanwhile, is able to assign the sun "duties" according to his will. The sun thus serves the speaker as the court huntsmen serve the king. This impossible reordering of the universe inflates the speaker's power past the point that any earthly prince or king's power can grow. And if the subordination of the sun is not enough, the speaker also undermines the power of political rulers directly in comparison to himself. He insists that he is not mimicking a prince but rather that, "Princes do but play us." The speaker and his lover are the paragon of imperial power. Real princes only imitate the lovers.

By "contracting" the entire world to the microcosm of the bed, the speaker asserts the authority and all-encompassing power granted to him by love.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 15-30

LOVE AND DIVINITY

The speaker's inflation of his importance in relation to political rulers is underscored by a playfully bold insinuation that to wake up in bed with a lover is analogous to an ascent to divine power. In other words, waking up to your boyfriend or girlfriend can make you feel like a god.

Although the speaker never explicitly names any religious themes, the poem's preoccupation with sovereignty (ruling power) evokes the notion of the divine right of kings. Kings in Donne's day were traditionally thought to derive their ruling power directly from God. If the speaker becomes more powerful than all of the world's rulers put together, he thus approaches godlike power.

On top of this implicit gesture to the divine, which Donne's readers would definitely have understood, the speaker calls into question that idea that the sun's beams are "reverend," or worthy of being worshipped like God. Whereas earthly kings must still kneel before the sun because it is one of the few things God does not place in their control, the speaker manages to transform the sun into a servant that kneels before him. The speaker thus becomes more "reverend" than the sun.

The poem's title furthermore likens the speaker to Christ upon his resurrection. Although the sun is explicitly the one who is "rising" according to the title, the entire poem is a meditation on the speaker's imperative to rise from bed. Because of this double "rising," and because the speaker positions himself as the one the sun must worship as kings worship the sun, the speaker might be said to be a second "sun rising ." Read aloud, as this poem was meant to be, the title contains a double entendre: "sun rising" also sounds like "son rising." The phrase "son rising" naturally evokes the rising or resurrection of Christ, the son of God. The speaker's thwarting of natural laws over the course of the poem is similar to Christ's thwarting of death via crucifixion. This similarity supports the notion that when the speaker wakes up in bed with his lover, he is experiencing a kind of divine resurrection that vests him with new Christlike sovereignty over kings, time, and nature.

The speaker's near-heretical claim to divine power is built upon his relationship with his lover. Only by likening her body to all the world's empires is the speaker able to assert himself as this Christlike figure who is exempt from the natural laws to which emperors must defer. Love, sex, and religion are intertwined in much of Donne's poetry. In this poem, love and sex are not only as powerful as religious devotion. Furthermore, love and sex forge an incredible intimacy between the lover and God. To lie in bed with a lover is not to refuse God. On the contrary, it is to rise as God's son.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 11-23

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-3

Busy old fool, unruly sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains call on us?

The first three lines of "The Sun Rising" establish the relationship and tension among the three entities of the poem: the speaker, his lover, and the sun. The speaker disparagingly personifies the sun as a "busy old fool" who is "unruly" in the face of some authority. That authority is revealed at the end of line three to be "us," the speaker and an unknown party (later revealed to be his lover), who together relish the peaceful darkness of a curtained room.

Note the speaker's use of "thou" to address the sun. "Thee" and "thou" are not simply old-timey or high-brow ways to say "you." In Donne's day, common English distinguished between familiar and formal forms of the singular "you." "Thou" was an appropriate address for family members, close friends, inferiors, or younger people. "You" was actually *more* formal and polite, and it would have been the proper address for someone deserving of respect or reverence. By calling the sun "thou," especially when the more obviously intimate relationship at hand is that between the speaker and his lover rather than the speaker and the sun, the speaker insinuates that the sun is an inferior being who owes the speaker respect and obedience. By shining through the windows and curtains, the sun is being unruly and rude not to some unspecified authority, but directly to the speaker and his lover.

The two main poetic devices at play in these lines further serve to elevate the speaker's power over the sun. The speaker uses apostrophe to ask a rhetorical question of an entity, the sun, who can't respond. When the speaker demands to know why the sun insists on shining through the curtains, he is uninterested in an actual justification. Instead, the speaker wants to convince the sun not to "call on" the lovers to get out of bed by claiming that to do so is "unruly." Because the question (and indeed, the whole poem) is addressed to an inanimate entity (the sun), the speaker does not bear the same risk that other rhetorical questioners may face. That is, the sun has no chance of responding dismissively or returning a counter question. Through the combination of apostrophe and a rhetorical questioning, the speaker thus creates a platform for himself to lecture the sun at length, with no insubordinate interruptions.

LINE 4

Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?

This line, a second rhetorical question, clarifies why the speaker and his lover are special and exempt from any authority the sun might have. Following directly from the introduction of "us" at the end of line 3, line 4 confirms that this pronoun refers to the speaker and a lover. Their exemption from the sun's authority is directly based on their status as lovers.

The speaker insists that they, or any lovers for that matter, don't have to structure their "seasons" according to the movement of the sun through the sky. The word "seasons" here doesn't necessarily refer to spring, summer, winter, and fall. In this context, it refers to events that happen at fixed times according to astronomical movements. Just as it is usually hot in the summer and cold in winter, people usually get out of bed when the sun is up and sleep when the sun is down. Morning is the "season" for rising. The speaker is calling into question his own orientation in the universe by suggesting that lovers' seasons might operate according to something other than the universal facts of day and night.

Aside from challenging the sun's usually-uncontested ability to govern the seasons of human beings, the speaker further boosts his own power by continuing to use the strategies introduced in the first two lines. He once again personifies the sun as an inferior by addressing it with the possessive form of "thou": "thy." And again, because the speaker uses apostrophe to address his rhetorical question to an absent party, the sun can't respond.

LINES 5-8

Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
Late school boys and sour prentices,
Go tell court huntsmen that the king will ride,
Call country ants to harvest offices,

These lines mark a shift in the poem: the speaker is no longer just asking rhetorical questions to which the sun cannot respond, and is now blatantly giving orders to the sun. What's more, the speaker tells the sun to give orders to a range of other people. The speaker thus doesn't completely destroy the hierarchy that gives the sun power over humans: instead, he leaves the hierarchy in place but maneuvers himself and his lover to the top of it.

The language with which the speaker addresses the sun in line 5 reinforces the personification of the sun in line 1 as a self-important fool under the impression that it has more power than it does. The word "saucy" suggests that the sun is being rude or cheeky toward its superiors without any awareness that it is behaving inappropriately. "Pedantic," meanwhile, suggests that the sun is like a boring schoolteacher, carrying on with a lecture that no one really cares to hear. A "wretch" is a miserable, pitiful creature. Say the phrase "Saucy pedantic wretch" aloud: it's cacophonous, full of hard consonants that demand clear enunciation. It's almost as if the speaker is spitting when he says these words. His contempt for the sun comes through all the clearer because of the way the words sound.

It seems ironic that the speaker describes the sun as a "saucy pedantic wretch" when he himself is cheekily lecturing the sun. This ironic doubling actually serves to make clearer the speaker's position at the top of a hierarchy: the sun's place in the hierarchy is to "chide" or scold school boys when they rebel against their schedule, and the speaker's place is to chide the sun when it rebels against lovers' all-important whims.

Regardless of their wishes, school boys and apprentices, must go to the classroom or the workshop when the sun rises. The rising of the sun is a good indication that it is time to suit up for the hunt because the king must structure his hunting schedule around the daylight hours, whether he likes it or not. At the other end of the class spectrum, "country ants," or common, rural farmers, must harvest their crops at a precise time of year and a precise time of day. The sun holds complete power over their schedules because if they miss the right time to harvest their crops, they might very well go hungry. The cacophony continues as the speaker tells the sun what to go do: these lines, too, are full of hard consonants (particularly hard /c/ or /k/ sounds) that crash over one another. The speaker wants to make daylight sound as unappealing as possible.

The fact that the speaker is talking down to the sun, which holds so much power over kings and "country ants" alike, marks the speaker himself out as exceptionally powerful. The speaker thus benefits from demonstrating that the sun is not simply a "saucy pedantic wretch," but is also a powerful being in its own right; it's simply not *more* powerful than the speaker. Everyone should want to be the speaker because to occupy his position is to be several steps up the ladder of power, even from where the king sits.

LINES 9-10

Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

These final lines of the first stanza are an aphorism, a pithy statement about the way the world works, that serves as the speaker's own answer to the rhetorical question posed in line 4. "Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?" the speaker had asked the sun, expecting no answer. After having told the sun whose seasons it can expect to control with its motions, the speaker now implies that lovers' seasons cannot be controlled by the sun because, in truth, all forms of love are superior to trivial, earthly things like seasons, climate ("clime"), and time.

The speaker's use of aphorism to conclude this stanza is crafty. An aphorism presents itself as self-evident, which means that if the speaker is convincing in his delivery of the lines, there is no need of further evidence to support the idea that love is

beyond the influence of seasons, climate, and time. As opposed to "hours, days, months," which all eventually wear out into "rags of time" as the sun rises and sets, love is eternal and can never decay.

The speaker has demonstrated in the preceding lines that the sun's power lies in determining the actions of a wide variety of people by determining seasons, climate, and the cycles of day and night. If love is exempt from the influence of these natural forces, it is by extension *also* exempt from the influence of the sun. If the sun could answer the rhetorical question posed in line 4, the only possible answer at this point would be no: unlike everything else in the world, lovers' seasons *don't* have to run to the motions of the sun, because lovers don't actually have seasons.

The speaker uses euphony to emphasize that eternal love is preferable to daylight and its demands. Recall the spitting cacophony of line 5, when the speaker calls the sun a "saucy pedant wretch," and of the following three lines describing the duties that must be carried out during the day. Lines 9 and 10, by contrast, sound much smoother. The speaker fills them with long vowels and soft l's and r's so that they roll off the tongue and sound beautiful. Whereas daylight and the duties it entails are unpleasant even to hear described, love sounds soft and inviting.

LINES 11-14

Thy beams, so reverend and strong
Why shouldst thou think?
I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,
But that I would not lose her sight so long;

The speaker opens the second stanza with yet another rhetorical question, continuing to demand that the sun justify its sense of self-importance. This time, however, the speaker doesn't even pretend to leave space for the sun to justify why it would think that its beams were strong and worthy of worship. The speaker follows the question up, even more immediately than he did in the first stanza, with an answer that preempts any rebuttal the sun could possibly offer were it present and able to speak. The sun may presume to send its beams where they are unwanted, but it's only because the speaker doesn't want to lose the sight of his lover that he is even keeping his eyes open to notice the sunbeams. Regardless of why the sun thinks it is powerful, it's wrong.

These lines are also the first instance in which the speaker refers to himself with the singular pronoun "I." In the first stanza, he referred to lovers in general, and he referred once to "us." The use of "I" here demonstrates that the speaker has some self-serving motives. Like he did in the first stanza, he continues to take down the sun's ego. However, he now does so by demonstrating how powerful he *individually* is in comparison to the sun.

Aside from the equation in the first stanza of love with eternity, this is the first hint of the poem's third theme, love and divinity. It's not abundantly clear yet that the speaker is laying claim to godlike powers, but he does claim that the simple act of closing his eyes would bring about an eclipse. On the one hand, this statement is not so bold: closing his eyes would, indeed, block out the light of the sun. However, to cause an eclipse is far beyond the power of a single human. One one level, then, love seems to have granted him superhuman powers. The idea that this man could cause an entire solar eclipse by closing his eyes also begins to hint at the poem's second theme, of love as a microcosm of the universe. The speaker has not revealed it yet, but he can cause a solar eclipse for the entire world because according to him, his bed *is* the entire world.

LINES 15-20

If her eyes have not blinded thine,
Look, and tomorrow late, tell me,
Whether both th' Indias of spice and mine
Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with me.
Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,
And thou shalt hear, All here in one bed lay.

This section of the poem introduces the idea of love being a microcosm of the entire universe. The speaker first compares his lover to a bright light or star that might blind even the sun if it looks at her. He then instructs the sun to check the globe for "both th' Indias of spice and mine" and suggests that both of these Indias have moved from their geographic locations to the very bed where the speaker and his lover are lying. The Indias the speaker references are the East Indies, known for their spices, and the West Indies, known for their gold mining opportunities. By drawing into his bed these two places, located on opposite sides of the world, the speaker turns his bed into a small-scale model of the entire globe.

Alternatively, it is possible to read the "Indias of ... mine" as a bit of wordplay that refers to the speaker's lover herself—with "mine" being a possessive word rather than referencing the practice of mining. In this reading, the speaker is saying his lover is as rich and valuable as India itself, with all its prized spices.

These lines thus introduce a gendered power dynamic through the language of imperialism. The insinuation that these lands "lie here with me" puts "th' Indias" in the place of the lover's body. All the world's kings, meanwhile, seem to be consolidated into the body of the speaker himself. It's important to note that the speaker chooses to reference not any far-off lands, but specifically places that the British and other European states would have been colonizing at the time. He identifies these colonies according to the sources of wealth they provide to Europe: the East Indies, at this time, were exploited for their spices, and the West Indies were exploited for their gold. Rich Europeans gathered these commodities for their own use back home, with little regard to how their exploitation affected local

populations.

By comparing his lover's body to the East and West Indies, the speaker thus turns her into a colony to be plundered for its valuable resources. He, as the composite of all kings, is the most successful and prosperous plunderer of all. Through this metaphor, which he extends through the rest of the poem, the speaker thus disempowers his lover so that *he* may become an extremely powerful, exploitative emperor. He is such a powerful emperor that in one day, since the sun last looked, he has stolen away two of the world's largest colonial pockets.

The metaphor of a woman's body as an entire world to be conquered is not unique to this poem. Donne uses the metaphor elsewhere, such as in "To His Mistress Going to Bed," where he refers to his mistress as "my America! my new-found-land." Similarly, in Scene XIII of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, Faustus kisses Helen of Troy and says that all of Heaven is in her lips. Through kissing her, he claims to map his own life onto the epic tale of the Trojan War. What is unique about Donne's use of a similar strategy in "The Sun Rising" is that the speaker uses the power he gains as a metaphorical emperor in order to rule over not only earth but also the heavens. Faustus's tragedy is that try as he might, he cannot escape the limitations of mortality. He can kiss Heaven, but he can't rule it. The speaker of *this* poem is far more successful in his sexual conquest, rising higher than the sun, which cannot even keep track of its own empire in the face of such a powerful king.

LINES 21-22

She's all states, and all princes, I,
Nothing else is.

These lines build on the extended metaphor begun in the previous stanza. They take the idea that the bed is a small scale model of the entire world and make the comparison even bolder by *cutting away* the rest of the world so that "nothing else is." The bed is no longer a model of the universe but, rather, *replaces* the entire universe.

Before the speaker explicitly states that "nothing else is," he inverts typical word order in line 21 in order to demonstrate that he and his lover encompass the entire universe. "All states," meaning every country in the world, and "all princes," meaning all their rulers, rest at the center of the line. Meanwhile, "She" and "I" bookend the line, enveloping all states and all princes between them.

The next line, "Nothing else is," is the speaker's boldest statement so far. The speaker has so far been using extended metaphor to compare himself and his lover to kings and their empires, but the comparison has had a playful tone. This line has three stressed syllables, despite being very short, and just one unstressed syllable:

Nothing else is.

Consequently, it sounds emphatic: it is a threat. The speaker has stopped telling the sun to go away and is now aggressively telling it that it had better not acknowledge the existence of anything outside the bed. To do so would be to deny the importance of the lovers.

Aside from its aggressive meter here, the length and syntax of the line leaves the reader startled and disoriented. Instead of using "exists" for the last word, the speaker uses "is," a linking verb that is typically followed by an object. Because the line is shorter than the rest of the lines, and because it ends with a linking verb, it invites the reader to move to the second half of the line just as it comes to a halt.

Up to this point, there have been very few lines mid-stanza that are end-stopped like this. The effect is that this short line grabs the reader's attention. The speaker is staging an ascent to the supreme throne of the universe; he backs up his claim that he is all-powerful by forcing the sun and his readers alike to look at and listen to him. Now that everyone is looking up at him, the speaker is more "reverend" than the sun ever was. The poem is called "Sun Rising," but it is really the *speaker* who has risen by now to a position of godlike authority.

LINES 23-24

Princes do but play us; compared to this,
All honor's mimic, all wealth alchemy.

The speaker recognizes that to say that nothing in the world outside of the lovers' bed even exists is a difficult claim to back up. In these lines, he amends his statement from the previous lines by stating that so-called "real" people and things, like princes, honor, and wealth, are cheap copies of the lovers, who are the *real* real deal.

The speaker uses asyndeton, omitting the "and" between "mimic" and "all" in order to convey a tone of carelessness toward what we call honor and wealth. The main poetic device at play here, however, is aphorismus. The speaker cannot entirely deny the existence of princes, honor, or wealth, but he calls into question the actual *meaning* of all these words. Just as an actor could never actually be a character on stage, political rulers can only do their best to inhabit the roles of the speaker and his lover. What we call honor looks like a ridiculous imitation of the true honor the lovers embody.

The speaker's statement that all wealth is alchemy compared to "this" uses aphorismus to hint at a cliché: a person in love is the richest person in the world. However, by invoking the concept of alchemy, the speaker adds a new twist. Alchemy is the medieval forerunner to chemistry, and the most well-known (although not the only) project an alchemist would undertake was the transformation of base elements into gold. It was well-known by Donne's day that this transformation was a fool's errand. By stating that all wealth is alchemy compared to what

he and his lover has, the speaker actually accomplishes a kind of reverse alchemy, transforming real-world wealth into something worthless. In this way, he makes himself into not the wealthiest person in the world, but, rather, the *only* wealthy person in the world.

LINES 25-28

Thou, sun, art half as happy as we,
In that the world's contracted thus.
Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
To warm the world, that's done in warming us.

At this point, the speaker has completely disoriented the sun and the reader in the universe they thought they knew. He has stripped the sun's kingdom of its geographic expansiveness. He has even demanded that everyone in the world kneel before him while he lounges in bed with his lover. Now, the speaker uses these lines to try to convince the sun that it ought to be glad of the new shape of the universe.

Line 25, in which the speaker tells the sun that it is "half as happy as we," may sound at first like a concession that the universe the speaker has described does not suit the sun as much as the old universe did. However, the speaker has already shown that "we" (the speaker and his lover) are more powerful, honorable, and prosperous than anyone else in the world could ever be. If they have infinite happiness, to be half as happy as them does not sound like a half bad deal for the sun.

The speaker is telling the sun that it should be glad of the new arrangement, but he's tricky. He says that the sun can get just as much credit in this new world order for a much easier job than it used to have. It's as if he's offering the sun the prestigious title of architect on an elaborate cathedral, and all the sun has to do is tour the place once in a while: too good to be true!

The offer is, in fact, too good to be true because the speaker slips in a job description that effectively means he, the speaker, is the sun's boss. Your duties have always been to keep the world warm, he says. Having demonstrated that the world is "contracted," or condensed into the bodies of the two lovers, the speaker is able to tell the sun that its new job is to keep "us" warm. Whereas before the sun gave orders to the world to get out of bed, the sun, should it accept this new, "easy" position, will be obeying the orders of the speaker and thereafter reporting directly to his every whim.

The speaker hands the sun this new job description by way of what is actually a false syllogism, arriving at a "logical" conclusion based on two statements that he presents as equally true despite the fact that one is far less sound than the other. The second statement, that the sun's duties are to warm the world, is fair enough. However, "Thine age asks ease," which translates essentially to, "You are old and need an easy job," is not provable except insofar as it refers back to the speaker's prior characterization of the sun as a "busy old fool." The speaker is doubling down on his personification of the sun as an old man, insisting that it is true. The speaker places these two statements side by side, as equally truthful claims, and arrives at the logical conclusion that the sun's job is to warm "us." The conclusion follows from the two statements, but one of the statements is far less objective than the speaker lets on.

The sun and the reader might see through the ruse of the false syllogism if not for the speaker's use of euphony, alliteration, and diacope. Repeated long vowels, repeated w's, and the repeated use of the word "warm" all make these lines sound beautiful and natural. The false logic is easy to swallow because it sounds so nice—much like the job offer the sun simply can't refuse.

LINES 29-30

Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;
This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere.

Donne does not stick to any one poetic form throughout this poem, but these final two lines form a couplet that might very well fall at the end of a traditional sonnet. A fourteen-line sonnet, especially a Shakespearean sonnet, often ends with a rhyming couplet that resolves a situation or problem presented in the first twelve lines of the poem. The couplet is usually pithy and often witty. These two lines certainly have both those characteristics, summing up the speaker's argument in a simple order to the sun that demonstrates all three key themes of the poem.

First, the speaker's order to the sun to "shine here to us" demonstrates that no matter the time of day, warming lovers in bed is far more important than any other duty the sun might think it has. At this point, the speaker has stopped even mentioning that the sun gives orders to other people to carry out their daytime duties. The speaker has turned himself into such an important boss that the sun need worry only about serving him, not about any of its own supervisory duties.

Second, the speaker emphasizes once more that the bed is a microcosm by turning it into not only his own empire, but also the sun's "center." He completely binds the sun within the walls of the bedroom: not only the world, but the sun's entire "sphere" (the cosmos) is encapsulated within these walls. Several decades had passed, at the time Donne was writing, since Copernicus had put forth the theory that the sun was the center of the solar system. To orient the sun around the "center" of the bed thus pushes even beyond the idea of microcosm, turning the lovers into a divine force with the power to pull the sun out of its fixed position and into orbit around them.

As if this godlike power were not enough, the speaker further demonstrates his own prowess by accomplishing all of this within the strict confines of poetic convention. Today, a 16th century sonnet might seem stuffy. At their heyday, however, sonnets were a kind of game. Court poets wrote them in order

to demonstrate how clever they were, and how many compact ideas they could fit into a very rigid mold. Although the poem is not a sonnet, readers at the time would have recognized the formal elements of the couplet as sonnet-like. First, it rhymes: the "where" of "everywhere" and "sphere" might sound different when we pronounce them today, but in Donne's day, the sound at the end of "sphere" probably sounded closer to "air" than "ear." Second, the couplet conforms precisely to iambic pentameter, the meter of the most traditional sonnets. This means that each line is composed of five metrical iambs, or feet, each containing two syllables (if we scan "everywhere" as two syllables, that is) and following an unstressed-stressed pattern:

> Shine here | to us, | and thou | art ev- | erywhere;
> This bed | thy cen- | ter is, | these walls, | thy sphere.

Note that many of the stressed syllables boil down to the key ideas that the speaker wants to leave the sun with: "here," "us," "thou," "bed," "walls," and "sphere." The poem began with the speaker's annoyance at being disturbed by the outside world. Now, not only through ideas but also through the speaker's poetic strategies, the outside world is banished. The speaker truly rises to power, enacting in meter his bold claim earlier in this stanza that "Nothing else is."

SYMBOLS

THE SUN

The speaker of "The Sun Rising" addresses the poem to the sun, but the sun is more than an annoyance the speaker wants to banish. The sun sits at the top of the cosmological hierarchy: it controls the solar system, and it answers, according to popular thought in Donne's day, only to God. The sun represents immense, near divine power. And when the speaker overthrows the sun and turns it into his servant, he is upending the entire order of the universe.

This order was conceived by the ancient Greeks as the "Great Chain of Being," and the concept was later revived by Renaissance philosophers. It placed everything in the world, living or not, somewhere along a chain that stretched from God all the way down to rocks. The sun was high on the chain. The anonymous speaker would have been much lower. In his effort to switch places with the sun, the speaker climbs up this chain, past the kings and princes thought to occupy the highest possible human link in the chain. The speaker's intellectual joust with the sun thus tangles up the Great Chain of Being.

By the end of the poem, the speaker has eliminated every link except for himself and the sun, reforging the chain so that he is not only the top link, but also an enormous link. By addressing the poem to the sun, which is already very high up on the Great Chain of Being, the speaker can rise to a near godlike position and stature in the universal hierarchy.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "sun"
- **Line 4:** "thy motions"
- **Line 11:** "beams"
- **Line 13:** "eclipse and cloud"
- **Line 25:** "sun"
- **Line 28:** "To warm the world"
- **Line 29:** "Shine"

EMPIRE

The speaker of "The Sun Rising" is obsessed with carving out an empire for himself. However, he refuses to leave his bed. By comparing his lover to "th' Indias of spice and mine," then to "all states," and by comparing himself to "all kings" and "all princes," the speaker expands his power beyond that of any earthly ruler. An empire represents, to the speaker, an extreme position of power. Running all the empires in the world is beyond human power.

By claiming to run all these empires within the comfort of his bed, the speaker accomplishes two things. First, he demonstrates that he doesn't need to get up in the morning in order to work his way into a position of power. The sun might as well let him sleep in. Second, he demonstrates that he is even more powerful than the sun by stealing entire empires out from under its nose.

The sun, kings, and princes were all thought during the Renaissance to derive their power directly from God. By consolidating the power of all kings and princes, and by demonstrating that he is more powerful than the sun, the speaker becomes the most powerful being in the universe apart from God. In this way, the speaker's conquest of all empires turns him into a Christ-like figure. He is God's "Son Rising" to challenge the "Sun Rising" in the poem's title.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 7:** "king"
- **Line 17:** "th' Indias of spice and mine"
- **Line 18:** " lie here with me."
- **Line 19:** "those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,"
- **Line 20:** "All here in one bed lay."
- **Line 21:** " She's all states, and all princes, I,"
- **Line 23:** "Princes do but play us"
- **Line 26:** "the world's contracted thus"
- **Lines 29-30:** "Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere; / This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere."

POETIC DEVICES

PERSONIFICATION

The speaker personifies the sun throughout nearly the entire poem as a self-important old man in order to rob the sun of its authority. This personification begins in the very first line, when the speaker addresses his words to a "Busy old fool, unruly sun." The poem thus opens with the introduction of the sun as a character with human traits. These traits are not to be looked upon favorably. In the speaker's ageist portrayal of the sun, it is getting "unruly," meaning that it is getting worse as it ages at serving those it is supposed to serve, but it is too "foolish" to realize its own decline.

The negative characterization of the sun remains consistent throughout the poem, so that the speaker's proposition at the end, for the sun to confine itself to the bedroom, is founded on the assumption that, "Thine age asks ease." Essentially, the speaker is telling the sun, "You're too old to be working so much these days." This is a veiled insult that, on the surface, might be read as a show of care and respect for the sun. However, the use of the familiar "thine" rather than the respectful "your" (again, in Donne's day "you" was actually a more formal form of address than "thou") demonstrates that the speaker is talking down to the sun rather than up to it: the uppity speaker turns himself into the sun's boss and offers it semi-retirement if it will only consent to do his bidding. The speaker's personification of the sun as an aging man thus allows him to invert the power dynamic between himself and the sun over the course of the poem.

Although the speaker only explicitly describes the characteristics of the sun in lines 1 and 5, the speaker orders the sun to take many actions, such as "go chide," "look," and "ask for." The speaker also implies that the sun has eyes to be blinded and that it leaves colonies lying around like collectibles. By the time the speaker tells the sun in line 25 that "Thou, sun, art half as happy as we," it seems natural that the sun would experience a human emotion like happiness. After all, it seems to have plenty of human agency and other human features. By turning the sun into a sentient being that thinks, acts, and feels, the speaker sets the stage to assign the sun "duties" in line 27. If the sun wants to be a person, the speaker seems to say, it will have to get a job like everyone else.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Busy old fool, unruly sun,"
- **Line 3:** "call on"
- **Line 5:** "Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide"
- **Line 7:** "Go tell"
- **Line 8:** "Call"
- **Line 12:** "thou ," "think"
- **Line 15:** "If her eyes have not blinded thine,"
- **Line 16:** "Look," "tell," " me"
- **Line 18:** "thou leftst them"
- **Line 19:** "Ask for," "thou saw'st"
- **Line 20:** "thou shalt hear"
- **Line 25:** "Thou, sun, art half as happy as we,"
- **Line 27:** "Thine age asks ease,," "thy duties"

EXTENDED METAPHOR

In the second half of the poem, the speaker develops an elaborate comparison between his bedroom and the entire universe. In this extended metaphor, the speaker's lover begins as "both th' Indias of spice and mine," meaning that she is the combination of all Europe's richest colonies. The speaker, meanwhile, is all the kings in the world. By line 21, the speaker's lover has become an even greater empire, encompassing not only the East and West Indies, but, furthermore, "all states."

While a metaphor usually allows two analogous things to exist parallel to one another, this extended metaphor actually leads the speaker to call into question the authenticity of "real" princes and states. In lines 23 and 23, the speaker states:

> Princes do but play us; compared to this,
> All honor's mimic, all wealth alchemy.

These lines demonstrate that when the speaker places himself and his lover beside all the states and princes in the world, the comparison is so striking that it seems like he and his lover are *more* state-like and more prince-like than the originals.

This extended metaphor, in which the bed comes to replace first the entire political realm and, later, the sun's entire "sphere," operates around the second major theme of the poem, love as a microcosm of the universe. The idea that the human body was a microcosm, or a small scale model of the universe, was popular in Donne's day. In this poem, it is not a single body but a pair of lovers who model and even replace the entire solar system.

Where Extended Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Lines 16-30:** " Look, and tomorrow late, tell me, / Whether both th' Indias of spice and mine / Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with me. / Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday, / And thou shalt hear, All here in one bed lay. / She's all states, and all princes, I, / Nothing else is. / Princes do but play us; compared to this, / All honor's mimic, all wealth alchemy. / Thou, sun, art half as happy as we, / In that the world's contracted thus. / Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be / To warm the world, that's done in warming us. / Shine here to us, and

thou art everywhere; / This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere."

CACOPHONY

The speaker uses cacophony in order to make the sun's usual habits sound unappealing and obnoxious. This poetic device occurs primarily in the first stanza, in lines 5-8:

> Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
> Late school boys and sour prentices,
> Go tell court huntsmen that the king will ride,
> Call country ants to harvest offices,

These lines are overfilled with consonants and with vowels that, while on their own might be perfectly inoffensive, don't sound especially pretty when strung together. The word "pedantic," for example, starts with a hard /p/ sound followed by a short /e/ sound that is cut short by a hard /d/ sound. The next sound is a nasally /an/ that is cut off yet again by a hard consonant sound, this time /t/. The word then ends with a short /i/ that is cut short by a hard /c/ sound. All the harsh sounds of this word come in the midst of a line that is just as full of choppy consonants and short or cut-off vowels. The cacophony continues as the speaker tells the sun to go about its usual business. The effect is that morning comes to sound, to the ear, like a horribly noisy affair.

Cacophony sets an important contrast for the euphony that is to follow when the speaker describes his bedroom as a far more beautiful place than the outside world. The cacophonous consonants abruptly drop out of the poem at line 9, and they are completely replaced with euphonious sounds. By making morning sound so unappealing, the speaker sets the stage for a new kind of morning that does not require him to get out of bed.

Where Cacophony appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "curtains call"
- **Lines 5-8:** "Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide / Late school boys and sour prentices, / Go tell court huntsmen that the king will ride, / Call country ants to harvest offices,"

EUPHONY

After introducing the sun's usual habits with cacophonous language, the speaker uses euphony in order to make more persuasive his argument for a new universe that is centered on his bed. One of the most euphonious moments in the poem occurs in lines 9-10:

> Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,
> Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

The soft /l/, /r/, /m/, and /w/ sounds, as well as a series of long and rounded vowels, combine to make these lines sound very lovely. They fall directly after the cacophonous description of how the sun rules everyone else's morning. This contrast makes them stand out as a pleasant-sounding aphorism to which the ear is inclined to listen.

Most of the rest of the poem is euphonious at least to a certain extent, filled with many soft sounds that complement one another and are easy to pronounce. Line 20, for example, places the homophones "hear" and "here" on either side of the central word "All." Not only does this create a resounding echo, but also the line contains a number of other euphonious sounds that are mirrored on either side. The open vowel sound of /ou/ in "thou" is mirrored by the /wuh/ of "one." The usually harsh consonant sounds /t/ and /d/ in "shalt hear" and "bed lay" are each softened by the vowel and /l/ sounds that sandwich them. All of these factors combine to make the line sound pleasant, and thus to add to its persuasive power.

Euphony grows the most pronounced in the end of the poem, when soft /th/ sounds and open /w/ sounds abound amidst open vowel sounds. At the end of the poem, when the speaker is describing the new universe in which he is the supreme ruler and the sun is his servant, euphony works like a kind of sales tactic. Because the speaker's language sounds so enticing, he does not have to do quite as much work to make the universe he is selling sound superior to the one he is rejecting.

Where Euphony appears in the poem:

- **Lines 9-10:** "Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime, / Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time."
- **Line 14:** "But that I would not lose her sight so long;"
- **Lines 17-20:** " Whether both th' Indias of spice and mine / Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with me. / Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday, / And thou shalt hear, All here in one bed lay."
- **Lines 27-30:** " Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be / To warm the world, that's done in warming us. / Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere; / This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere."

ALLITERATION

Alliteration in this poem largely plays into the euphony and cacophony the speaker uses to persuade the sun that it would be happier if it let him sleep in with his lover. There is a lot of alliteration in this poem, from the repeated hard /c/ or /k/ sound in lines 7 and 8:

> Go tell court huntsmen that the king will ride,
> Call country ants to harvest offices,

To the repeated /w/ sound in the closing lines of the poem:

> All honor's mimic, all wealth alchemy.
> Thou, sun, art half as happy as we,
> In that the world's contracted thus.
> Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
> To warm the world, that's done in warming us.
> Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;
> This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere.

In these closing lines, there are even several instances where there is no written /w/, but there is effectively an audible /w/ sound. For example, line 29 contains the utterances "to us" and "thou art." Try saying these phrases aloud. In both instances, transitioning from the first to the second word requires the mouth to form the same shape as it does when uttering the /w/ sound.

The hard /c/ sound contributes to the cacophony of the first stanza. The speaker uses harsh sounds to describe how the sun rules the lives of those poor unfortunate souls who don't have love to justify lying in bed past dawn. The shift from repeated hard /c/ sounds in line 8 to repeated /l/ sounds in line 9 ("Love, all alike...") foreshadows the shift to euphonious language over the course of the whole poem. By the end of the poem, when the speaker has laid out a new and preferable order to the universe, he alliterates heavily with soft, open /w/ sounds that sound warm and inviting. Alliteration thus helps the speaker to sell the sun and the reader on the new universe he is proposing as a replacement for an undesirable old universe.

Alliteration also helps the speaker to make it seem more natural for him to call the sun by the familiar form of "you": "thou." The /th/ sound is the most frequently alliterated sound throughout the poem, but it actually starts as two sounds: the hard /th/ of "through" and the soft /th/ of "thou" or "thus." The hard /th/ sounds a little harsher than the soft /th/. It is jarring for the speaker to be calling a superior, such as the sun ought to be, by "thou." By the final stanza, the hard /th/ sound has dropped out, and the soft /th/ sound of "thou" is interwoven among the inviting /w/ sounds. The speaker's formerly "harsh" address to the sun now rolls naturally off the tongue.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "th," "th"
- **Line 3:** "Th," "th," "c," "c"
- **Line 4:** "M," "th," "m"
- **Line 6:** "s," "s"
- **Line 7:** "c," "th," "th," "k"
- **Line 8:** "C," "c"
- **Line 9:** "L," "a," "a," "l," "n," "kn," "n"
- **Line 10:** "N"
- **Line 11:** "Th"
- **Line 12:** "th," "th"
- **Line 13:** "c," "cl," "cl," "w," "w"
- **Line 14:** "th," "w," "l," "s," "s," "l"
- **Line 15:** "th"
- **Line 16:** "L," "t," "l," "t"
- **Line 17:** "Wh," "th"
- **Line 18:** "wh," "th," "l," "th," "l"
- **Line 19:** "th," "th"
- **Line 20:** "th"
- **Line 23:** "P," "p"
- **Line 24:** "w"
- **Line 25:** "Th," "h," "h," "w"
- **Line 26:** "th," "th," "w," "th"
- **Line 27:** "Th," "a," "a," "a," "th"
- **Line 28:** "w," "w," "th," "w"
- **Line 29:** "a," "th," "a," "wh"
- **Line 30:** "Th," "th," "c," "th," "th," "s"

ENJAMBMENT

There are four instances of enjambment in "The Sun Rising." All of them serve in part to maintain the meter and rhyme scheme of the poem. For example, "chide" in line 5 rhymes with "ride" in line 7, and ending line 5 at this point keeps the line to the four stressed syllables typical of the fifth line of each stanza:

> Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide

The maintenance of meter and rhyme scheme is the primary explanation for enjambment in lines 5-6, in lines 17-18, and in lines 27-28. Enjambment serves an additional purpose in lines 11-12:

> Thy beams, so reverend and strong
> Why shouldst thou think?

Here, the use of a line break where there would naturally be no punctuation or break in the sentence serves as a kind of bait and switch. The speaker inverts the sentence, "Why shouldst thou think thy beams so reverend and strong?" so that up front, it sounds as though the speaker is flattering the sun. If the sun is first lulled into the belief that the speaker does believe its beams "so reverend and strong," the question that is to follow cuts all the deeper.

This instance of enjambment demonstrates how the speaker's tone teeters between playful or teasing and boldly challenging. By teasing the sun about its belief that everyone worships it, the speaker makes it look silly. This teasing seems fairly benign. By making the sun look foolish though, the speaker is also able to position *himself* as the smarter and more powerful of the two.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** “chide”
- **Line 6:** “Late”
- **Line 11:** “strong”
- **Line 12:** “Why”
- **Line 17:** “mine”
- **Line 18:** “Be”
- **Line 27:** “be”
- **Line 28:** “To”

CAESURA

Caesura occurs all throughout "The Sun Rising." To an extent, it is the effect of complicated sentence structure and Donne's conformity to meter. In some instances, there is bound to be a need for punctuation mid-line. However, whenever caesura occurs, it is carefully placed so as to emphasize whatever word has come before it. For instance, there are commas both after the speaker calls the sun a "fool" in line 1 and after he calls it a "wretch" in line 5. By interrupting each line after each of these disparaging words, the speaker can let them resound a little to get their full effect; in other words, there's a short breath after each word that allows these insults to linger in the air.

The speaker uses caesura to achieve a similar effect in the instance of "Love" in line 9, "states" and "princes" in line 21, and "walls" in line 30. All of these words are key ideas related to the major themes of the poem. In fact, if there is a caesura, it is a clue that the word preceding it is important and worth a quick pause for extra consideration.

Additionally, caesura sometimes serves to add to the euphony of a line. Line 20, for example, sounds especially euphonious when it is emphasized that the line is a phonic mirror image—that is, the three middle words of the line create a sort of palindrome (a phrase that reads the same backwards and forwards), sound-wise: "hear, all here." The comma in the middle of the line slows down the reader and helps to achieve the mirrored sound.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “,”
- **Line 3:** “,”
- **Line 5:** “,”
- **Line 9:** “,” “,”
- **Line 10:** “,” “,” “,”
- **Line 11:** “,”
- **Line 16:** “,” “,”
- **Line 18:** “,”
- **Line 20:** “,”
- **Line 21:** “,” “,”
- **Line 23:** “;”
- **Line 24:** “,”
- **Line 25:** “,” “,”
- **Line 27:** “,”
- **Line 28:** “,”
- **Line 29:** “,”
- **Line 30:** “,” “,”

APOSTROPHE

The speaker addresses this entire poem to the sun. He personifies the sun and pretends that it is an old man who is not very good at its job. However, the speaker never thinks that the sun is actually going to respond to him. Even if it did have the human characteristics the speaker assigns to it, the sun exists at an enormous distance from anyone on Earth. The addressee of the poem is thus absent and will never be able to answer the speaker, no matter how much it objects to what the speaker says.

Apostrophe also adds to the poem's structural similarities to the sonnet. Love sonnets in the court at Donne's time were often addressed to absent objects of affection, usually beautiful women. Philip Sidney's Astrophil and Stella sonnets, for example, centered around the love affair between Astrophil and his absent lover, Stella, who was characterized as star-like because of her distance and intangibility. "The Sun Rising" is once again marked as being like a sonnet, but not quite a sonnet, by its slightly-off use of apostrophe. The lover in this instance is in the speaker's bed and far from intangible. This time, it is an actual distant star, the sun, to whom the speaker addresses himself. The sun, in the position the admired woman usually occupies, should be flattered to be the object of apostrophe. Because of the way the poem maps onto customary love poetry, the speaker is able to be very manipulative, acting as though he wants what is best for the sun even as he insults it.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “ Busy old fool, unruly sun,”
- **Line 2:** “thou”
- **Line 4:** “thy”
- **Line 5:** “Saucy pedantic wretch”
- **Line 11:** “Thy”
- **Line 12:** “thou”
- **Line 15:** “thine”
- **Line 18:** “thou”
- **Line 19:** “thou”
- **Line 20:** “thou”
- **Line 25:** “Thou, sun,”
- **Line 27:** “Thine,” “thy”
- **Line 29:** “thou”
- **Line 30:** “thy,” “thy”

RHETORICAL QUESTION

The first two stanzas of "The Sun Rising" both open with rhetorical questions. In both cases, the rhetorical questions rub it in the sun's face that it is absent and not only not expected to answer, but also unable to answer. By asking questions that cannot be answered, the speaker builds a platform on which he can launch into a long lecture on why:

1. The sun has no business "calling on us" through curtained windows;
2. "Lovers' seasons" must not, in fact, be dictated by the sun;
3. And the sun should not think of its beams as "reverend and strong."

These three points are the gist of the poem's entire argument. While the use of questions may at first seem like the speaker is trying to open a dialog with the sun so that they can sort out their differences, the fact that the sun can't respond turns the questions back on the speaker and allows him to air all of his own grievances uninterrupted.

In addition to guiding the argument of the poem, the rhetorical questions also anchor the poem's extended metaphor in reality. Especially in the second half of the poem, the speaker turns to elaborate metaphor and insists that he is "all princes" while his lover is "all states." It's important to remember, however, that this entire time, the lovers are lying in bed. The rhetorical questions set out the speaker's main complaints and demonstrate *why* he is making this elaborate comparison. They are useful signposts to seek out if the metaphor gets confusing.

Where Rhetorical Question appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-4:** "Why dost thou thus, / Through windows, and through curtains call on us? / Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?"
- **Lines 11-12:** "Thy beams, so reverend and strong / Why shouldst thou think?"

APHORISM

Lines 9-10 of "The Sun Rising" are an aphorism, which the speaker uses as an answer to the rhetorical question in line 4. "Do lovers really have to go about their day according to the sun's agenda?" the speaker essentially asks the sun in line 4. He never expected the sun to answer the rhetorical question, and because the sun is not present nor truly a thinking being, the sun never *could* have answered the question. The speaker chooses to interpret the sun's silence as an opening to answer the question himself. He states:

> Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,
> Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

Note that the speaker does not say, "I *think* love, all alike..." or "In my *opinion*, love, all alike..." to indicate that he is expressing his own viewpoint on the subject. Instead, he offers up the answer as an aphorism, presenting it as definitive truth or common sense.

The reader does not have to believe him, but the speaker uses language that *sounds* convincing, even to the reader who is unconvinced by his actual *logic*. The lines are very euphonious, containing a lot of soft or muffled /l/, /r/, /n/, /m/, and /w/ sounds, as well as a lot of long or open vowel sounds (season, all, no, nor, clime, days, etc.). The poetic idiom "rags of time" also sounds learned and wise. These factors combine to give the aphorism a ring of truth.

By getting the sun and the reader to accept as truth the idea that love is immune to the earthly power of time, the speaker is able to build himself an empire in the rest of the poem. Whenever it seems his power is growing too great for one person, he can fall back on the "truth" contained in the aphorism: love defies the laws of the universe.

Where Aphorism appears in the poem:

- **Lines 9-10:** "Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime, / Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time."

SYLLOGISM

"The Sun Rising" ends with the triumphant conclusion to a syllogism. In lines 27-28, the speaker claims:

> Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
> To warm the world, that's done in warming us.

These lines look like a complete syllogism in and of themselves, a series of points directed at the personified sun:

- Premise 1: Your age requires that your job be as easy as possible.
- Premise 2: Your duties are to keep the world warm.
- Conclusion: You can do your job and make it easy by keeping only us warm.

Upon closer inspection, however, the syllogism falls apart. What is the major premise, and what is the minor premise? The two premises do not work together to produce the conclusion the speaker offers. The conclusion states that the sun can complete its job responsibilities by warming the speaker and his lover, but premise 2 specifically states that the sun is required to warm the entire world.

The speaker does, however, supply another premise that makes the conclusion true. This premise unfolds over the course of the poem's second half and can be summed up by the speaker's claim in line 26 that "the world's contracted thus." The premise

that the world is "contracted" to the lovers and no one else supplies the missing piece of logic to the syllogism. The new structure of the syllogism might be described like this:

- Premise 1 (major premise): Your duties are to keep the world warm.
- Premise 2 (minor premise): The entire world is in this bedroom.
- Conclusion: You can do your job by keeping only us warm.

This conclusion then transforms into the major premise for a second syllogism:

- Premise 1 (major premise): You can do your job by keeping only us warm.
- Premise 2 (minor premise): Your age requires that your job be as easy as possible.
- Conclusion: There is no reason you shouldn't want this new job, in which you report to us and us alone.

Because the conclusion that "You can do your job by keeping only us warm" immediately becomes the major premise in another syllogism, there is scarcely any time to evaluate whether or not it is a valid conclusion in the first place. The poem proceeds as if it is entirely true, and by the time there is an opportunity to pause and reflect on whether or not the logic makes sense, the reader's mind has already gone through the motions of believing it in order to understand the next logical leap. Even if the reader and the sun eventually become skeptical of the speaker, the speaker has already won by making himself seem, even temporarily, like the logical emperor of the universe.

Where Syllogism appears in the poem:

- **Line 26:** "In that the world's contracted thus."
- **Line 27:** "Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be"
- **Line 28:** "To warm the world, that's done in warming us."

APHORISMUS

After the speaker claims that his lover is "all states" and that he is "all princes," he declares that "Nothing else is." Elevating himself and his lover so high makes everything else in the world crumble in comparison. The speaker uses aphorismus to call into question that which the rest of the world calls "princes," "honor," and "wealth." More specifically, "compared to this" (meaning compared to love), real princes, real honor, and real wealth don't seem to live up to those titles at all.

The speaker's phrasing demonstrates that he is not calling into question the fact that there *are* such things as princes, honor, and wealth; he simply does not think that the words are employed *correctly* in their everyday usage. "Princes do but play us," he claims. The speaker has already said that he is "all princes," so he *embodies* rather than *rejects* the concept of princes. However, those individuals who people ordinarily call princes are, in the speaker's mind, merely actors trying to mime something more authentic. He is the more authentic prince that these other "princes" can only pretend to be. Similarly, what people call honor is "mimic," or an imitation of the authentic honor the speaker and his lover have.

The idea that the speaker and his lover are more authentic than anything in the real world really comes to the fore in the statement that "all wealth [is] alchemy." Alchemy is the chemical transformation of base substances into more valuable substances, namely gold or an elixir that grants immortality. By Donne's day, this kind of transformation was widely regarded as impossible. The comparison of real-world wealth to alchemy implies that all the riches in the world can never be more than a pile of money, despite anyone's attempts to turn it into the kind of happiness the speaker and his lover have. Money is of finite value; love is invaluable. True wealth can only be found in love, not in money. Aphorismus thus serves to widen the gap the speaker creates between lovers and the rest of the world. Love is so out of this world, the speaker uses this poetic device to say, that everything powerful and important shrinks in its presence.

Where Aphorismus appears in the poem:

- **Lines 21-24:** " She's all states, and all princes, I, /
  Nothing else is. / Princes do but play us; compared to this, / All honor's mimic, all wealth alchemy."

ASYNDETON

In the aphorism at the end of stanza 1 in "The Sun Rising," the speaker uses asyndeton in order to emphasize the extent to which everyone in the world *except for lovers* is governed by units of time. The speaker begins the aphorism by including conjunctions in the proper grammatical places, but these conjunctions soon drop out:

> Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,
> Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

In the most conventional sentence construction, "nor" would also appear before "days" and before "months" as well (nor hours, nor days, nor months"). Alternatively, "nor" would appear before "months" but not before "hours" given that all of the items in the list take the same conjunction ("hours, days, nor months"). In the construction the speaker uses, however, it is as if he wants to emphasize that love knows *no* season *nor* clime, *nor* hours, but then he gets tired of emphasizing things and pushes through the units of time without any conjunctions whatsoever.

Look at how the aphorism is book-ended by two very different nouns: "love" to start, and "rags of time" to end. When the speaker is near to "love," he emphasizes what love is *not* through the use of conjunctions. As he draws away from "love" and nearer to "rags of time," it is as if he becomes wearier and more trapped in the ongoing flow of these temporal units. This construction shows rather than tells how different and superior love is because, unlike the "late school boys," "sour prentices," "court huntsmen," "king," and "country ants" of the preceding lines, it is not trapped in this cycle of time that is tiring even to describe.

In addition to asyndeton, the list of "hours, days, months" is also an example of parataxis. The hours, days, and months blend into each other because they are listed in parallel, with no conjunctions to separate them or mark out their relative importance. In this context, both poetic devices work toward the same effect, which is to make the march of time sound wearisome, while love sounds powerful for evading this march.

Additional points at which conjunctions are eliminated for effect include line 24:

> All honor's mimic, all wealth alchemy.

and line 30:

> This bed they center is, these walls, thy sphere.

In both of these instances, not only are conjunctions eliminated, but so is the repeated use of the verb "to be." The conventional construction of line 24 would be, "All honor's mimic, **and** all wealth **is** alchemy." In the case of line 30, the conventional construction would be "This bed thy center is, **and** these walls **are** thy sphere." The elimination of conjunctions and the sparing use of linking verbs allows the speaker to pack more interesting words into the meter of the lines. These packed lines sound more striking and memorable than the more conventionally constructed lines.

Where Asyndeton appears in the poem:

- **Lines 9-10:** "Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime, / Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time."
- **Line 24:** "All honor's mimic, all wealth alchemy."
- **Line 30:** "This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere."

DIACOPE

There are two clear points at which the speaker of "The Sun Rising" uses diacope. At each point, the poetic device serves a slightly different function. First, in line 3, the speaker uses the word "through" twice, with only two words in between the two instances:

> Why dost thou thus,
> **Through** windows and **through** curtains call on us?

Second, in line 28, the speaker states that because the sun's job is:

> To **warm** the world, that's done in **warming** us.

In the first instance, the double use of "through" emphasizes how unreasonable and "busy" the sun is being by shining through multiple layers of defense against the outside world. The lovers are trying to maintain privacy behind not only windows, but also curtains. The sun is rudely disregarding *both* of these signals that the lovers do not want to be disturbed.

In the second instance of diacope, each occurrence of the word "warm" or "warming" is followed closely by an object: first "the world," then "us." The parallel placement of "the world" and "us" after the verb "to warm" emphasizes that the two objects are interchangeable. Diacope thus supports the speaker's claim that the entire world is "contracted" to the bed where he and his lover are lying.

Where Diacope appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "Through," "through"
- **Line 28:** "warm," "warming"

ANAPHORA

The speaker of "The Sun Rising" uses anaphora at several points to emphasize his point. In the first stanza, the speaker gives several commands in succession to the sun. He begins the first two commands with the word "go:"

> Saucy, pedantic wretch, **go** chide
> Late school boys and sour prentices,
> **Go** tell court huntsmen that the king will ride,

The use of "go" allows the speaker to double his imperative verbs. Rather than simply telling the sun to "chide" school boys, he tells him to "*go* chide" them. He thus emphasizes his power to order the sun around. Additionally, if the sun must "go" in order to carry out the speaker's orders, it will no longer be bothering the speaker and his lover. Repeated commands that begin with "go" act somewhat like repeated stomping of the foot. The speaker is telling the sun over and over again, "listen to me."

By the time the speaker reaches his third command, "Call country ants to harvest offices," he no longer needs to stomp his foot. The structure of this command is parallel to the others except in its omission of "go." This parallel but slightly-different structure emphasizes that the speaker is still giving the sun orders, but that he has already grabbed the sun's attention

through his previous orders. He no longer needs full anaphora to make his point.

The later instances of anaphora occur in stanza 3. First, the speaker states that:

> All honor's mimic, all wealth alchemy.

Finally, he ends the poem in line 30 by claiming:

> This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere.

In both cases, the parallel structure that results from anaphora allows the first half of the line to echo in the second half of the line. If the speaker were simply to say that "All honor's mimic" and that "This bed thy center is," the lines would sound much weaker. Repetition of these first statements creates a reverberating effect, and the lines become some of the most memorable of the poem.

Additionally, in line 30, the repeated use of "this/these" calls the sun's attention again and again to the bedroom. It wants to shine on the entire world. By calling it back to "*this* bed" and "*these* walls," the speaker keeps it focused where he wants it instead of wandering about outside its "sphere."

Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "go"
- **Line 7:** "Go"
- **Line 24:** "All," "all"
- **Line 30:** "This," "these"

VOCABULARY

Busy (Line 1) - Prying, interfering, overly involved in someone else's affairs. The sun might say that it is busy doing its job, but the speaker is suggesting that the sun is a busybody that should mind its own business.

Unruly (Line 1) - Ill-behaved, unmanageable, rebellious. The speaker uses this word to insinuate that the sun is acting out of turn by going about what it thinks of as its "business."

Dost (Line 2) - Do. "Dost" sounds old-fashioned because it is the proper form of "do" to accompany the pronoun "thou," which has fallen out of use.

Thou/thy/thine (Line 2, Line 4, Line 11, Line 12, Line 15, Line 18, Line 19, Line 20, Line 25, Line 27, Line 29, Line 30) - You/your/yours. Many modern readers mistake the various forms of "thou" for a sign of formality. This is not the case at all. In early modern English, "thou" was the informal or familiar form of the singular "you." It was used to refer to family, close friends, younger people, and inferiors. The speaker uses it throughout the poem to refer to the sun, asserting his superiority over his addressee.

Season (Line 4, Line 9) - A period of time that recurs based on astronomical forces. It might be what we refer to as a season, like winter, spring, summer, or fall, or it might be something more general, like an event that occurs as part of a daily routine because of astronomical forces like day and night.

Saucy (Line 5) - Rude, defiant, disrespectful toward an authority figure.

Pedantic (Line 5) - Like a boring schoolteacher, constantly lecturing and showing off knowledge or authority that no one cares about.

Wretch (Line 5) - Someone miserable or pitiful.

Chide (Line 5) - Scold or reprimand.

Sour (Line 6) - Ill-tempered, annoyed. The "prentices" here are bitter or "sour" that they have to get up early to do their work.

Prentices (Line 6) - Apprentices. In Donne's day, an apprenticeship was something like trade school. Around adolescence, a child would be apprenticed to a master craftsman, like a blacksmith or a bookbinder. The apprentice worked as an assistant to the master, learning the skills to eventually take over the business or start a new business of their own.

Country ants (Line 8) - Rural farmers. The speaker is not referring to actual ants, but rather uses this phrase metaphorically to emphasize the ant-like work ethic rural farmers need in order to care for their crops.

Offices (Line 8) - Duties. The speaker is not talking about physical offices, but rather is referring to the work that must be done during the day to make sure crops are property grown and harvested.

Clime (Line 9) - Climate. Unlike farmers or hunting parties, whose pursuits rely on weather patterns and the length of the day at various times of year, love does not have to worry about these earthly conditions.

Rags of time (Line 10) - Worn out remains of the past, disintegrating under the influence of time. Hours, days, and months are all temporary. The current day, for example, will soon be only a memory, the way a rag is the memory of what used to be a functional textile. Love, the speaker argues, never wears out.

Reverend (Line 11) - Deserving of respect, or reverence. The word has religious connotations, suggesting that the sun thinks it deserves the kind of devotion a churchgoer might give to God.

Th' Indias of spice and mine (Line 17) - The East Indies and the West Indies. Both we being colonized by European countries at the time of Donne's writing and were exploited for their natural resources. In the case of the East Indies, European trading companies stole spices and sold them at a huge markup in

Europe. Colonization of the West Indies was a little newer at this time, but European explorers mounted many expeditions there with the hope of finding gold to sell at even higher prices back home.

States (Line 21) - Independent political states, meaning countries or empires.

Mimic (Line 24) - Imitation, an obviously lesser copy. The word is used here as a noun, not a verb. The word "honor's" is not possessive, which would indicate that mimic belongs to honor, but is rather a contraction of the phrase "honor is." Mimic is what honor is turned into in this instance of aphorismus.

Alchemy (Line 24) - The medieval and early renaissance craft of turning substances into other substances. Alchemy broadly defined is the predecessor of the modern study of chemistry, but it is particularly associated with the attempted transformation of base substances into gold. The elixir that was said to accomplish this goal was sometimes also thought to grant immortality. If wealth is alchemy, amassing wealth is an impossible attempt to transform a valueless substance, money, into something invaluable.

Contracted (Line 26) - Shrunk down to a small space, especially a circle or sphere.

Asks (Line 27) - Demands or requires.

Sphere (Line 30) - Celestial globe. The kind of sphere referenced here is a model that shows where heavenly bodies, like the sun, lie in relation to one another. According to the speaker, the bedroom walls are the outer limits of the solar system.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

This poem does not take any specific, established form, but it does have formal similarities with various versions of the sonnet. Whereas a sonnet has 14 lines, this poem has 30, which are divided into three stanzas of 10 lines each. However, like most sonnets, the predominant meter of the poem is iambic pentameter. The rhyme scheme is also a hybrid of Italian and English sonnet rhyme schemes.

What's more, each stanza ends with a couplet that resolves the question or problem of that stanza. The first stanza, which turns on the question of whether lovers must obey the sun, ends with a couplet that declares the answer to be no. The second stanza ends with a summarizing couplet: the sun should not think its beams "so reverend and strong" because the entire world has been stolen out from under these beams. The third stanza, finally, ends with a powerful couplet that resolves the entire poem: the sun can keep shining, but it should stop trying to make the speaker and his lover leave the bedroom. To do so would be beyond the scope of its authority.

The adapted sonnet form is significant because writing a good sonnet was one of the ways Elizabethan and Renaissance court poets distinguished themselves. Writing a good poem while obeying all of the rules was a challenge, and succeeding was a mark of real talent and skill. This poem, which aims to rewrite the rules of the universe, takes on the challenge, but it willfully disregards some of its rules. This disregard is not a shortcoming. Instead, the poem presents itself as superior to literary convention just as the speaker presents himself as superior to universal laws.

METER

The meter of "The Sun Rising" varies quite a bit throughout the poem, though the spots of variation are the same in each stanza. The third, fourth, and seventh through tenth lines in each stanza are in iambic pentameter (meaning that they're composed of five iambs, poetic feet consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable). Take line 7 and line 8:

> Go tell | court hunts- | men that | the king | will ride,
> Call coun- | try ants | to har- | vest of- | fices,

Iambic pentameter is one of the most common formal meters and is characteristic of many traditional verse forms, such as the sonnet. Although the poem does not take any particular traditional form, Donne's use of iambic pentameter demonstrates that he is a skilled and practiced poet.

The second line in each stanza is in dimeter (just two feet per line compared to pentameter's five). Take line 2:

> Why dost | thou thus,

The poem is hardly consistent in its use of iambs, however. These departures from the standard meter of the poem are not poetic failures, but rather serve a purpose. For example, look at line 22:

> Nothing | else is.

This line consists of a trochee ("Nothing") followed by a spondee ("else is"), resulting in a line with three stresses in its meager two feet. This is a very important line, in which the speaker boldly replaces the entire universe with his bedroom. The meter of the line stands out from the rest of the poem and sounds much more emphatic, amplifying the speaker's voice as he erases the rest of the world.

Finally, the first, fifth, and sixth lines in each stanza are in tetrameter (four feet per line). This encourages the reader to slow down over disparaging words, adding to the tone of contempt the speaker holds toward the sun. Again, however, the use of iambs is not consistent and the feet are quite varied throughout. Take lines 5 and 6:

Saucy | pedan- | tic wretch, | go chide
Late school | boys and | sour pren- | tices,

The stressed syllables in both of these lines contain hard or hissing consonants in combination with long vowels, and there is extra space in each line for the resultant harsh sounds to come through because the lines are shorter than surrounding lines. The order and distribution of emphasized syllables through each line is also less regular than it is in the lines in pentameter. The choppiness adds to the cacophony that makes this description of the sun's duties sound unappealing to the ear.

Other departures from iambic pentameter add variety, interest, or organization. The beginning of each stanza, for example, is clearly marked out even when the poem is read aloud because line 1, line 11, and line 21 all have four instead of five iambs.

RHYME SCHEME

Although "The Sun Rising" does not conform exactly to any specific form, it has several formal elements in common with the sonnet. Rhyme scheme is one of these elements. Each of the three ten-line stanzas has the following rhyme scheme:

ABBACDCDEE

This rhyme scheme is not *exactly* that of any traditional form, but it draws elements from the rhyme schemes of two different sonnet types. The Italian or Petrarchan sonnet's rhyme scheme looks like this:

ABBAABBACDECDE

"The Sun Rising" seems to get the rhyme scheme of its first four lines from this type of sonnet. Meanwhile, the CDCDEE section seems to come from the end of a Shakespearean or English sonnet, whose rhyme scheme looks like this:

ABABBCBCCDCDEE

Each stanza of "The Sun Rising" thus looks something like a hybrid sonnet with four lines cut out somewhere in the middle.

The mix-and-match, chaotically ordered use of established rhyme schemes reinforces the way the speaker takes the laws of the universe and twists them to his own ends. Rhyming conventions and universal laws are not entirely rejected, but they are upended and rewritten to serve the desires of the speaker.

SPEAKER

The speaker of "The Sun Rising" is never named nor gendered, but via context is most likely *intended* to be a man (that said, it's perfectly possible to read the poem otherwise!). This man wants to lie in bed all day with his lover, but the sun is getting in the way of this objective by rudely shining through the drawn bedroom curtains. The speaker's goal is to knock the sun down a peg.

As the poem goes on, it becomes clear that by deflating the sun's ego, the speaker also wants to elevate his own authority. The speaker does not reveal much about his social status, but he is probably fairly well off if he is still lying in bed past dawn. He also seems more worried about social expectations of productivity than about actually earning money or food for his table. It is thus not through the social ranks that the speaker is desperate to rise. In fact, he claims early on to be more powerful already than a king; later, he even goes so far as to say that "princes do but play us." Instead of social power, the speaker is after the kind of cosmological power that the sun holds over the entire universe. As the sun rises, the speaker wants to rise even higher.

By the final stanza, he is not only calling the sun a busybody, but he is also claiming to be "all princes." Instead of banishing the sun in favor of permanent night, the speaker redesigns the sun's job and tells it to concentrate entirely on warming the bedroom. This way, the speaker and his lover get to enjoy the warmth of the sun without feeling like it's nagging them to get to work. Their job is to lie in bed, and the sun's job is to make the bed even more comfortable.

SETTING

The setting of "The Sun Rising" is a bedroom. Cultural references in the first stanza, such as "school boys," "sour prentices," "court huntsmen," "king," and "country ants," or rural farmers, support the idea that the bedroom, like John Donne, is located in Renaissance England. A reference in the second stanza to "th' Indias of spice and mine" situates the bedroom globally, far away from both the East Indies and West Indies. This part of the poem also situates the speaker within a colonial culture that profits off the exploitation of the East Indies and West Indies, which once again supports the idea that the bedroom is located in England, or at least Europe. However, the speaker wants to trim away all this context, making the bedroom into an entire universe.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Donne is often classified as a metaphysical poet. These poets did not classify themselves this way when they were writing, but the 18th century critics Samuel Johnson and John Dryden grouped Donne with George Herbert, Andrew Marvell, and Henry Vaughn under this category because all of their poetry uses logic and elaborate metaphor or conceit to conceptualize metaphysics—that is, how the mind and spirit relate to material reality.

Donne died only about 15 years after Shakespeare, so his poetry is rooted in some of the same Elizabethan court traditions. One such tradition was the use of sonnets not only to declare love, but also to demonstrate poetic skill. Shakespeare and Donne both wrote a lot, and among both of their best works are sonnets that are very playful and complicated. "The Sun Rising" is not one of Donne's sonnets precisely, but it does have some elements of the sonnet.

Despite what Donne shares with Shakespeare, he has his own distinct voice. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he has voices: Donne, who became a minister later in life, is known especially for his equal skill at writing erotic poems and holy sonnets. Many of the metaphors Donne uses in his erotic and devotional poetry are very similar. For example, when Donne was very sick, he wrote the holy sonnet "Batter My Heart, Three-Person'd God." This poem is addressed to God. The speaker worries that, despite their love of God, they are too close to the devil to be admitted to heaven upon their death. The speaker ends the poem by begging:

> Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
> Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
> Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

The closing line achieves an interesting paradox: God must "ravish" the speaker in order to keep them "chaste." The fact that this profoundly religious paradox is achieved through a metaphor of sexual violence reveals that for Donne, sex, power, and devotion are linked. "The Sun Rising" demonstrates this link as well. In this poem, sex allows the speaker to "rise" so that his power is like that of God. Love and sex with a woman allow for the same kind of closeness to God that the speaker begging to be "ravished" by God craves.

"The Sun Rising" at first appears more playful than the holy sonnet. It is important to note, however, that the speaker's rise to power requires that he treat the body of the woman in bed with him like an empire, free for the taking. Believe it or not, though, Donne's willingness to represent the bodies of women and to incorporate women into his conceits was somewhat revolutionary in literature. Most aristocratic love poetry before Donne's was written to or about absent women. Donne's depiction of women who are not chaste, and his disinterest in shaming women for their sexual activity, may have helped pave the way for novels like Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and Frances Burney's *Evelina* to begin exploring the idea of women's bodily autonomy in the following century.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Protestant viewpoints began to emerge throughout the 16th and 17th centuries. The Catholic Church was strictly hierarchical. The English abandoned this hierarchy during the reign of Henry VIII (1509-1547) in order to skirt the rule preventing Henry VIII from annulling his marriage. The Anglican Church was established as a Protestant alternative to Catholicism, and other Protestant churches began cropping up as well. By the time Elizabeth I was in power, during the second half of the 16th century, English Catholics had to go into hiding to avoid persecution. Among other features, Protestantism eliminated the priest as middleman between the individual and heaven, allowing for more individualized, personal relationships with God.

That is not to say that the speaker's ascent to God-like power in "The Sun Rising" was not bold. Many people, especially in Catholic parts of Europe, worried about the limits of the personal empowerment Protestantism allowed. "The Sun Rising" certainly seems to test those limits. In the early days of the Protestant Reformation, Copernicus had put forth the theory of heliocentrism, which held that the planets revolved around the sun rather than the earth. Some saw this scientific claim as blasphemous because it contradicted the biblical story of Genesis and went farther than humans should to understand the universe. In 1633, the same year "The Sun Rising" was published, Galileo was arrested in Italy for conforming to Copernicus's theory of heliocentrism. Not only does this poem begin with the theory of heliocentrism, but it also reproduces the universal reorganization Copernicus did by placing not the earth, and not the sun, but the *speaker* at the center of everything's orbit.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Articles and Essays on Donne — See what some other scholars have had to say about Donne's work. (http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/donne/donnessays.htm)
- Digitized First Edition — See a digitized first edition of some of Donne's poetry, including "The Sun Rising." (https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/first-edition-of-john-donnes-poems-1633)
- "The Sun Rising" Read Aloud — Listen to a recording of renowned Shakespearean actor Richard Burton reading Donne's entire poem aloud. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILpUp-JE8h0)
- Donne's Biography and Bibliography — Browse a short biography of Donne and a selected bibliography of his prose and poetry collections. (https://poets.org/poet/john-donne)
- "In Our Time" Podcast Episode — Listen to an introduction to Donne and the other Metaphysical Poets from BBC's "In Our Time" podcast. (https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00cbqhq)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER JOHN DONNE POEMS

- A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning
- Death, be not proud
- The Flea
- The Good-Morrow
- To His Mistress Going to Bed

HOW TO CITE

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