

THE SUN RISING

The first conceit, the extended metaphor in "The Sun Rising," is the speaker's treatment of the Sun as pedantic, annoying interruption. In the first stanza, the speaker chides the Sun, telling it to go wake up schoolboys and hunters. The speaker, in bed with his lover, does not want to awake or have to leave the bed. Then to underscore his point that the Sun is an unwelcome intruder, the speaker notes the Sun's (and Time's) irrelevance because their love is beyond the confines of time.

Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time. (9-10)

In this **dramatic monologue**, Donne uses apostrophe, a figure of speech in which the speaker addresses an abstract idea, absent person, or personified object. In this case, the speaker addresses the personified Sun. The poem is narrated in the present tense as the Sun rises. This poem is an example of hyperbole, an exuberant exaggeration of the speaker's love, the second extended metaphor.

The **rhyme scheme** for all three stanzas is abba c d c d e e. Some of the lines are short and this accentuates the speaker's monologue of scolding the Sun. The increases the intensity of his voice and establishes the Sun's personification.

In the second stanza, the speaker flatters the Sun, but follows up by mocking its supposed power, claiming he can eclipse the Sun's light with a wink. The speaker continues his mockery and continues praising the love between he and his mistress. He claims that his love is so grand that all the spice, wealth, and royalty of the world "here in one bed lay."

In the third stanza, the speaker's glorification of his love with his mistress reaches new heights. The poem has two extended metaphors. One is the personified Sun as an annoying and pretentious interruption. And, ironically, the speaker is also pretentious in the praise of his love which he claims is, at least metaphorically, worth all the value in the world. She, his lover, is "all states" and he is "all princes." And there is nothing else. Everything else is just a copy of themselves.

The speaker finally invites the Sun to shine on them. One could argue that the speaker is overdoing the glorification of his love. One could also argue that he is just so in love that he doesn't want it to end; he does not want to be reminded of the passage of time (which is the Sun's job, rising and setting). For the speaker, the entire world is their bedroom. If the Sun shines on them in that room, it shines everywhere. Their love is a world all by itself. Since this love is timeless, it cannot be disturbed by the Sun's indications of the passage of time. In this respect, the speaker is not merely flaunting his love in spite of the Sun. He is praising the richness of the intimate experience.

Meter: iambic pentameter

Diction/word choice: everyday language of that era, examples: dost, thou, thy

Syntax: verb comes at the end, example: line 4

Rhyme scheme:

The rhyme scheme of each stanza (ABBACDCDEE) is a quirky mix of two types of sonnet forms, the Petrarchan and the Shakespearean. The first four lines follow the Petrarchan sonnet and generally set up the new argument or image, including rhetorical questions. The next four conform to the sort of sonnets becoming popular during Donne's lifetime, and they extend the image and provide some sort of proof or answer for the argument. The final couplet, being an easier, more obvious rhyme, seals what was previously stated in a strong and memorable way. The final lines of the poem demonstrate this sense of closure. Argument? *Won.*

Lines 1-3

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

- The poem grabs us by insulting us. Or someone. It's hard to tell. Fortunately the wait isn't too long; the next phrase tells us that he is talking to the sun. **Personification.** Talking to inanimate objects is an [apostrophe](#).
- Take a closer look at those first two adjectives: "busy" and "old." Those aren't random—he's going to come back to these two ideas at the very end of the poem. John Donne, like many of the people who originally read his poems, was a well-educated lawyer. That means that his poems are carefully constructed arguments and he is setting up his case right from the start.
- He also sets up the condescending, brazen tone that is going to carry all the way through the poem. The first half of the first line makes the sun sound like a cranky old man, but then Donne immediately switches the image. He calls the sun unruly, as if it were a child or a pet that misbehaved. This is some serious 17th-century smack talk.
- The second line shows us that this is a question, but not one the sun is supposed to answer. You can roughly translate "Why dost thou thus?" as "Why you gotta be like that?"
- We get some context in the next line, seeing the sunlight coming through windows and curtains. That repetition of "through" is called [parallelism](#) and it works well with the [iambic meter](#) to create a nice [rhythm](#).

- There's an obnoxious little grammar move that Donne pulls here in the first sentence. He withholds that main verb—"call"—until the very end. He basically says, "Dumb sun, why do you..." and then seven syllables and a whole line pass before he finishes his thought. And it is because he withheld the verb that it hits us so hard; we've been waiting for it. Now we understand why he is so angry—the sun has interrupted his blissful night.
- There's also a [rhyme](#). "Sun" doesn't have a rhyming buddy just yet, but "thus" and "us" go together. So the [rhyme scheme](#) so far goes a little something like this: ABB. Stay tune for more.

Lines 4-6

*Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?
Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
Late school-boys, and sour prentices,*

- Has your alarm ever gone off and you laid there in bed with this elaborate fantasy that somehow—just for you—the sun wasn't really coming up? That you still had hours and hours of glorious sleepy-dreamy time? Come on, be honest.
- That's basically Donne's question here to the sun. Do lovers like us *really* have to get up just because you started your daily routine? But of course it's a sarcastic question, because Donne is *way* too good for the sun. So we could translate it more like this: "Did you *really* expect my lady and I to get up just because you shined in here? You've got to be joking."
- Only two lines ago, the sun was an unruly child, but in line 5, Donne changes the [metaphor](#). The sun is now a "saucy, pedantic wretch." Picture the crabby, sarcastic teacher that always had lipstick on her teeth. This new [image](#) extends that question in line 4; it may have *some* power over *some* people, but definitely not over us. We are way too awesome.
- Notice that Donne uses an imperative verb. He isn't just chatting with the sun; he's bossing it around. He commands it to go away and bother other, lesser people.
- The next three lines give examples of the types of people the sun still has some power over. Those lesser people move in ascending order from late schoolboys to sullen apprentices making their way to work to servants of royalty to working class folk.
- The word "prentices" is short for apprentices. These would have been teenage kids who were learning a craft from a skilled worker. Basically, they are interns in charge of bringing the coffee and doing the dirty work.

Lines 7-8

*Go tell court-huntsmen that the King will ride,
Call country ants to harvest offices;*

- The verb changes in line 7 from chiding the kids and teenagers to telling the adults. This is another indication that he is moving up the scale of humanity. This deliberate distinction between social classes has to do with the Renaissance belief in the [Great Chain of Being](#). That's the notion that everything in creation has a specific and determined rank in the eyes of God. So you start down at the bottom with rocks and move all the way up through people and kings and angels to God.
- The reference to the king calling his huntsmen is a shout-out to the reigning [King James I](#), who was known to love riding and hunting.
- Let's be clear. John Donne never met a [metaphor](#) he didn't like. So even though we are already in this elaborate metaphor about the sun telling people what to do, he goes ahead and gives us a mini-metaphor in line 8, referring to peasant farmers as "country ants." In doing so, he is reminding us that he and his lover are above such people. They're higher up in the ranks.
- By the way, in this context, "offices" doesn't just mean a cubicle; it means a duty or responsibility.
- And last but not least, the rhyme scheme continues: "ride" rhymes with "chide" from line 5, and "offices" rhymes with "prentices" from line 6. That gives us ABBACDCD. Things are gettin' fancy.

Lines 9-10

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

- Line 9, with all its commas and flip-flopped [syntax](#) is a little bit like a puzzle. At the most basic level, Donne is saying that love doesn't change with the seasons or climates. That little phrase, "all alike" modifies (describes) love and is probably best taken to mean "always the same."
- Donne is famous for his lists. When he starts getting ranty, he tends to turn to lists to express his emotions. He does the same thing in two of his most famous poems, "[Death be not proud](#)" and "[Batter my heart, three-person'd God.](#)" Here, the list "hours, days, months" reiterates the consistency, the steadfastness of his love. This is in contrast to many traditional aubades (poems written to a lover at dawn), which deal with the sun shedding light on an illicit relationship. The lovers are more often aware of the fleetingness of passion, rather than of their everlasting bond.
- We also get another little peek at that Great Chain of Being mentality here. Notice that Donne orders the units of time from smallest to largest.
- The final metaphor is very catchy; in fact, Donne used it elsewhere in a sermon. By referring to hours, days, and months as "rags of time" he is contrasting them with eternity and (we assume) his eternal love for his beloved. It's a clever way to brag: hours and days and months may pass, baby, but my love for you will never die. (You might write that one down, fellas.)

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.*

- We promised ourselves we would hold off as long as we could, but it's time for a lesson in [medieval cosmology](#). Though there was a lively debate among intellectuals of the time, the prevailing belief was the old Ptolemaic model of the earth at the center of the universe. Then everything else in the sky rotated around the earth in its own sphere. The bigger the sphere, the higher and more important it is in the chain of being, and has control over the smaller spheres. It was also all mixed up with religious beliefs, so that stars and planets were seen as holy, or at least closer to God, the "prime mover" who set everything into motion. That's a lot of explanation for the use of the word "reverend" in line 11 to describe sunbeams, but it will keep coming up, so we thought we might as well.
- Donne shows his knowledge of recent scientific discovery in talking of the sun's beams. It was a recent idea that humans saw objects because of the light cast on them. You can see in other poems by Donne references to "eye beams," the metaphorical light our eyes cast on objects.
- Seeing "beams" followed by "strong" gives a metaphorical sense of wooden beams, making the reference feel less frilly and more solid.
- But then Donne reverses our expectations to mock the sun again. It looked like he was saying something nice there in line 11, but line 12 reveals the verb and the rest of the question: "Why would anyone think that?" Once again, Donne withheld the verb and changed the normal [syntax](#) to create an effect on the reader.
- That question is like a hypothetical proposition that needs a proof. And like any good attorney, Donne is ready to prove his case. Why do I dare to insult the sun? Well, says line 13, because if I just close my eyes then all those sunbeams disappear.
- His argument is really clever. He went out of his way to talk about how solid the sun's beams are and now in one phrase we see that they are actually totally insubstantial.
- He also keeps up the sun [metaphor](#) in his bragging. He makes himself greater than the sun because his eyes can "eclipse" and "cloud" the sun's beams.
- Line 13 also features some really lovely sound effects. Notice the [alliteration](#) with hard "c" sounds at the beginning of the line and softer "w" sounds at the end.
- The fourteenth line reminds us that this is a love poem. It's like when a guy is trying to defend a girl's honor by standing up to some tough guy. At some point, they always forget about the girl and just start bragging and comparing their biceps.
- But here in line 14, Donne leaves off his attack of the sun to say something sweet—and maybe a little cheesy. He says that he *could* eclipse the sun with

a wink, but if he did, he would have to take his eyes off his beloved and he just doesn't know if he could stand it. (You might be able to see *our* eyes rolling just a little bit.)

Lines 15-18

*If her eyes have not blinded thine,
Look, and tomorrow late tell me,
Whether both the Indias of spice and mine
Be where thou left'st them, or lie here with me.*

- Donne maybe stretches it a little in making a clever **paradox** in line 15. He tells the sun that if the beauty of his lover's eyes has not blinded the sun's eyes, then the sun should take a look around.
- First, we aren't so sure about the sun having eyes—kind of a weird **metaphor**. Second, do you really want someone to take one look and your girlfriend and be stricken blind? Yikes.
- Let's give the guy some credit, though. He's saying that just as the sun is so bright and radiant that one look can blind you, even the sun can be blinded by the brightness and beauty of his lover's eyes.
- Then things get even weirder. He is still commanding the sun: "Look, and tomorrow late tell me," but he now claims that if the sun were to go look around the world, it would find that everything now resided inside this one bedroom. This is the part when we shake our heads like Scooby-Doo. The whole world has just collapsed into a single room?
- The Indias mentioned in line 17 are the East and West Indies. The East Indies was a broad term for the entire Indian subcontinent and was a land prized in the eyes of traders and poets for its valuable and exotic spices. The West Indies were the newly discovered Caribbean Islands that were thought to be rich mining opportunities.
- It is almost as if Donne is playing a trick on the sun, flaunting his power over it. Remember, the sun has the divine right to rule over the earth, to take care of it. Donne asserts the sun's control in line 18, saying that the sun is in charge of leaving countries just as it finds them, but then he teases the sun: "you won't find them there! I have taken them and now they are here with me."

Line 19-20

*Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,
And thou shalt hear, All here in one bed lay.*

- Line 19 is **parallel** to line 16—the narrator commands the sun to check up on its kingdom. In line 16, he told the sun to tell him tomorrow what he saw; in line 19 he tells the sun to remember the kings he saw only yesterday. Basically, "Now you see them, now you don't."

- Donne has also switched senses. In the previous parallel example, Donne commands the sun to look with its eyes. Here his command is for the sun to ask around and "hear" what's going on. Poets like to shake up their sensory images.
- Here's the weird part of the [metaphor](#): he reiterates the same claim he made before about the Indias, that all the kings of the world can now be found in his bed. That's a pretty bizarre and not so pleasant [image](#).
- So Donne ends the stanza having made one strange claim—that he is even stronger than the sun—and backed it up with a logical argument. But he makes an even stranger claim to close the stanza—the whole world is now located in my bed. In the last stanza, Donne tells us how this is possible.

Line 21-24

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

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

- We begin the last stanza talking about the lover, which is nice, because, you know, this is a love poem.
- Line 21 contains two simple [metaphors](#). First, he equates his lover with all countries. (This is, we hope, not a reference to her weight.) Second, he compares himself to all rulers. There may be some chauvinism here in that he is the ruler or conqueror and she is land to be taken, but it's a pretty common metaphor in 17th-century poetry. Donne's dirtiest poem, "[To His Mistress Going to Bed](#)," uses the same [imagery](#) (only more explicitly).
- Donne uses the linking verb "is" to create his metaphor. Linking verbs (like "is") are direct and blunt, so the metaphor is clear to the audience. To make it even more direct, Donne doesn't even repeat the verb in the second metaphor. The first "is" is applied to both subjects, a technique known as a [zeugma](#) (which *is not* an aerobic dance exercise).
- There is another clever poetic technique in play here—[chiasmus](#). A chiasmus is a syntactical reversal: "She is x; y is I." We haven't talked a lot about the [form](#) or [meter](#) of the poem yet, because, well, it's complicated. But we're sure you noticed that the second line of all three stanzas is really short, only four syllables.
- In the previous two stanzas, they set up his metaphysical questions, but in the final stanza this short line makes a bold and blunt proclamation: "Nothing else is." Really, John? Nothing else in the entire world exists except for you and your lover? Ego, much?
- Donne's playful egomania keeps right on coming, giving us three examples of the fakeness of the world compared to the reality of himself and his girl. Princes are big fakers, pretending they are as mighty as the narrator. All honor is only simple mimicry. All wealth is alchemy.
- Okay, that one might be a little confusing. Alchemy is the ancient search for a method for turning metals into gold. By Donne's time, science had more or

less debunked that myth and anyone claiming to have found the secret to alchemy was likely thought of as a con artist.

- Line 24 shows us another example of parallelism and zeugma. We have the verb "is" attached to "honour," but it is dropped from the second phrase. This serves to strengthen the connection between the ideas and reinforce to us how fake the rest of the world now is—compared to the speaker's love, that is.

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.*

- Line 25 returns us to the **apostrophe**: Donne is talking to the sun. It also grows more brazen in its claim, saying the sun is "half as happy" as Donne. Usually the sun is seen as pretty, well, sunny. It's mighty bold to say that someone could be twice as happy.
- Why are they happy? Line 26 tells us that it's because the whole world has been contracted into their bedroom. When the sun comes up for everyone else, they have to get busy and scurry off to work. But now that the world has collapsed for Donne and his lady, they are free to lounge in bed all day—that's their world.
- By this time, Donne acts as if he has made the world actually shrink. He says "thus," as if by claiming the world has contracted in the previous stanza, it is now a plain fact. Obviously, a guy who was a lawyer, poet, and priest had a pretty strong belief in the power of language.
- Remember way back in line 1, Donne called the sun a "busy, old fool"? He's returning back to that label here at the end, with his mock-sympathetic tone.
- He tells the sun in line 27 that the sun's weak old age demands that the sun take it easy. You know, in case the sun breaks a hip trying to make it over the Pacific Ocean in time for dawn the next day.
- Line 27 also brings back the idea of the sun being busy—the sun's "duties" include warming up the whole world.
- Donne then becomes a used car salesman: "Look Mr. Sun, you're tired, you're busy, you don't want to run around all day trying to warm up the world. So I'm going to make you a deal—this one time only. You warm up the Mrs. and me right here in this bed and it'll warm up the whole rest of the world for you."
- He's using the screwy logic of his metaphor to throw the sun a bone. If the whole world is here in this room, then the sun can linger right there and still do its job.
- It may be a stretch to read this into this poem, but Donne really enjoyed making **puns** with his own name. Line 28 may have a hint of that: "By warming Donne, you're all done!"

Lines 29-30

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

- The last two lines of the poem are really about wrapping up the argument and leaving us with a new and bizarre picture of these two lovers in bed.
- We began the poem with Donne asking the sun to go bother someone else. Now at the end of the poem, he is commanding/pleading with the sun to stay and only shine on them.
- It's as if at the beginning he believed that if the sun could only go away that they could remain there and be happy. But now he realizes that it is the outside world that will come and make demands on them, so he obliterates the rest of the universe and asks the sun to stay with them.
- The final line takes us back to the cosmology of Donne's day. The bed is the earth—the center of the universe around which everything else revolves. The outer walls of the bedroom? The sphere of the sun, the farthest boundary that the sun can be. He's collapsed the entire Great Chain of Being—the entire known universe, even—into their one room.
- This last line is also another example of making metaphors by using a linking verb ("is") as a [zeugma](#), just in case you wanted to hear us use that word again.