

The Sun Rising

JOHN DONNE

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.

"The Sun Rising" is a poem written by the English poet John Donne. Donne wrote a wide range of social satire, sermons, holy [sonnets](#), [elegies](#), and love poems throughout his lifetime, and he is perhaps best known for the similarities between his erotic poetry and his religious poetry. Much of his work, including "The Sun Rising," was published after his death in the 1633 collection *Songs and Sonnets*. In "The Sun Rising," the speaker orders the sun to warm his bed so that he and his lover can stay there all day instead of getting up to go to work. The poem's playful use of language and [extended metaphor](#) exemplifies Donne's style across his work, erotic and religious alike.

“The Sun Rising” 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.

“The Sun Rising” 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.

• 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.

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.

