

'The Sun Rising'
by John Donne



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Aubade

- ❖ A poem which greets the dawn
- ❖ A sorrowful poem of lovers parting at dawn
- ❖ Donne's take is unusual: rather than greeting the sun he rebukes and mocks it for waking him and the lady with whom he has spent the night



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

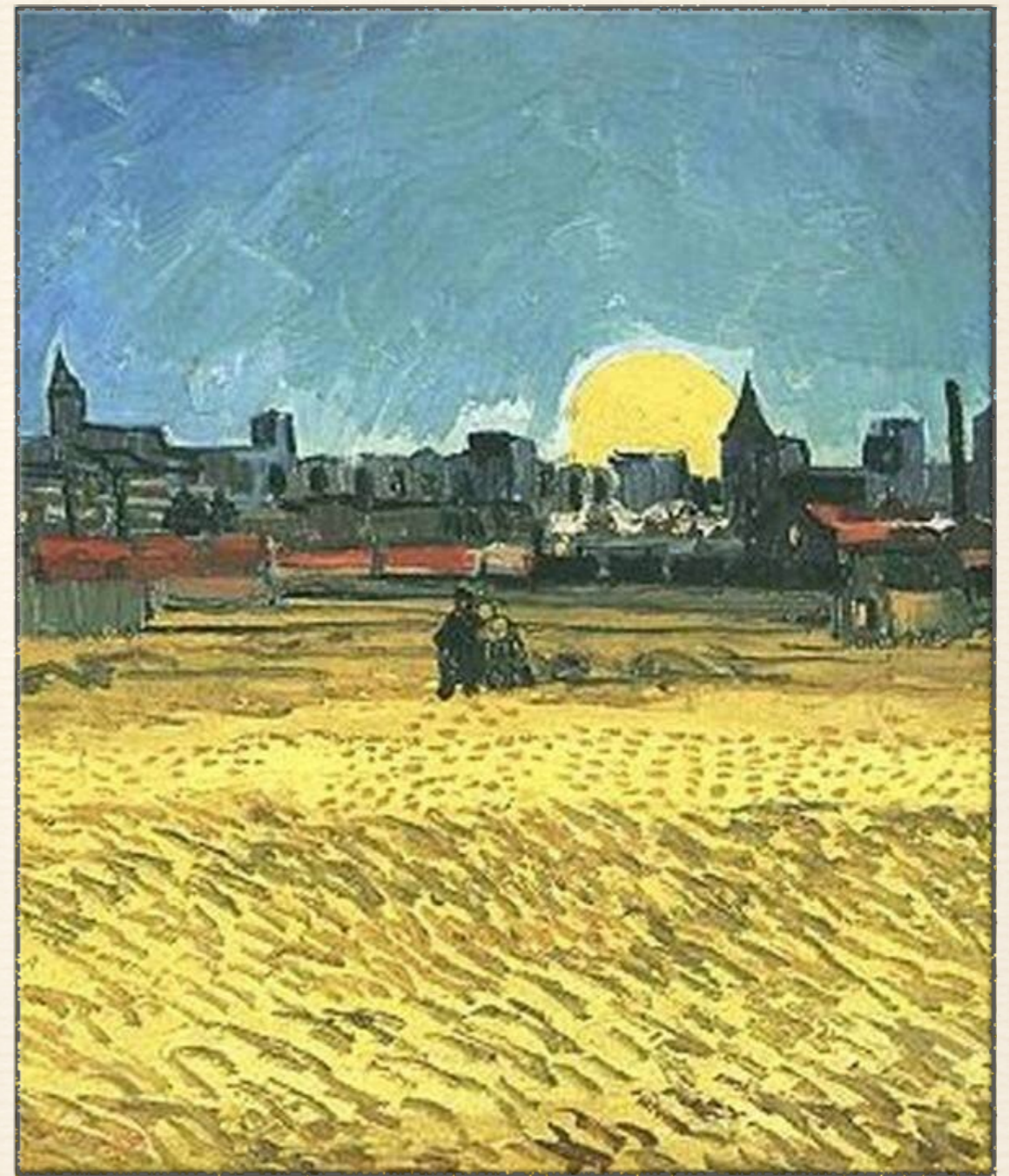
- ❖ Donne opens with a direct address to the sun
- ❖ It is a dramatic and vivid start to the poem
- ❖ Tone is insulting: he calls the sun a ‘Busy old fool’
- ❖ Conceit is that the sun is an old man who rouses people from sleep and sends them off to work
- ❖ The sun is chided for being ‘unruly’

Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?

- ❖ Donne is dismissive of the sun here
- ❖ He wonders why lovers should obey the sun
- ❖ Lovers, it is implied, are above such commands
- ❖ The sun represents the outside world and Donne does not want to be reminded of it right now

Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide Late school-boys, and sour prentices,

- ❖ Again, Donne belittles the sun
- ❖ It is a fussy, saucy 'wretch' but has no power over him and his loved one
- ❖ The sun should concern itself with those over whom it actually has power: school-boys and apprentices.
- ❖ The apprentices are 'sour'; the sun's call to work brings no joy compared to the joy the lovers feel in their quiet contentment



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

- ❖ Now the sun should busy itself with waking the huntsmen who serve the king and the farmers who reap the harvest
- ❖ 'offices' here means duties
- ❖ The quiet of the lovers' bed is contrasted with the frenetic activity of the outside world

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

- ❖ The poem now moves from questions and orders to the more romantic description of love
- ❖ This rhyming couplet sums up the idea that love transcends time
- ❖ Unlike all the people named earlier, Donne and his lover are free from both the control of others and the sun
- ❖ 'hours, days, months' are dismissed as 'the rags of time'
- ❖ They are mere divisions of time but have no importance for the lovers

Thy beams, so reverend and strong
Why shouldst thou think?
I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,

- ❖ Donne appears to change his attitude towards the sun.
- ❖ It is 'reverend and strong'.
- ❖ However, Donne points this out simply to show the power he has over it. He reverts to his previous mocking tone when he says that simply by closing his eyes, he could 'eclipse' the sun's beams.

But that I would not lose her sight so long

- ❖ This is a powerful expression of Donne's love
- ❖ He would not close his eyes for even a moment as it would mean that he could not see his beloved
- ❖ The soft 's' sounds in this line emphasise the gentle romance of the poet's sentiments

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

- ❖ The woman's eyes are so bright that they outshine the sun.
- ❖ The poem moves from the confines of the bedroom to the wider world
- ❖ The sun, which has shone on all corners of the globe, is asked whether all that is precious in the world exists in the East and West Indies or in the lovers' bedroom

“The world of love contains everything of value; it is the only one worth exploring and possessing.”

—Achsah Guibbory

Does Donne succeed in persuading us that he and his lover exist in a world apart?

- ❖ Earlier, Donne claimed that what one critic calls ‘his internal world of love’ is not subject to the ‘hours, days, months, which are the rags of time’ but now he does not want to close his eyes because it would mean his losing sight of his lover for ‘so long’. He also refers to ‘tomorrow late’ and ‘yesterday’ which seems to suggest that the little world of their bedroom is not, after all, capable of transcending time and resisting or ignoring the outside world.



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 honour's mimic, all wealth alchemy.

- ❖ Donne tells the sun to travel the world and see all its treasures and its great rulers. It will find that they are not there as everything of value is in bed with him. His lover is 'all states' and therefore he is ruler of the world.
- ❖ This hyperbole emphasises and elevates the love Donne feels. Nothing else can be as important. Nothing truly exists but he and his lover. Anything else is a poor imitation. All honour and wealth outside the bedroom is fake. Their room has become the centre of the universe.
- ❖ This hyperbole combines well with the litotes (deliberate understatement) of the earlier lines in which time was reduced to 'rags' and the following in which all wealth is merely 'alchemy'.

“[The speaker and his lover] become the world and occupy the same position of centrality as the sun. They become, in short, the still point around which all else is supposed to revolve, and around whom all time passes.”

—Thomas Docherty

Again, we ask if Donne has truly succeeded in showing the unimportance of the outside world?

- ❖ Earlier Donne rejected the sun and all the various social classes from peasants to kings. Now, however, his language shows that the outer world still has power. Why else would he compare his lover to ‘all states’ and himself to ‘all princes’? Remember, Donne was keen for social elevation but lost it all when he secretly married Anne.
- ❖ There is also a note of conquest here and a hint that women are inferior. After all, she is merely the territory he rules.



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.

- ❖ Donne pities the sun which, because it is alone, can only be 'half as happy' as the lovers.
- ❖ The world has been shrunk down to the bedroom in which the lovers lie.
- ❖ Donne shows mock pity for the sun, telling it that it deserves to rest as it is old (think back to 'Busy old fool'). He offers it comfort, saying that if it shines on the lovers, it will effectively be shining on the whole world.

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

- ❖ Donne's shift in attitude towards the sun - from regarding it as a 'Busy old fool' to pitying it for having to work so hard when it is old - is typical of his poetry.
- ❖ Final thought: How does view of love and seduction compare to that in 'The Flea'?

