

# John Donne: Poems Summary and Analysis of "The Sunne Rising"

The poet asks the sun why it is shining in and disturbing him and his lover in bed. The sun should go away and do other things rather than disturb them, like wake up ants or rush late schoolboys to start their day. Lovers should be permitted to make their own time as they see fit. After all, sunbeams are nothing compared to the power of love, and everything the sun might see around the world pales in comparison to the beloved's beauty, which encompasses it all. The bedroom is the whole world.

## Analysis

"The Sunne Rising" is a 30-line poem in three stanzas, written with the poet/lover as the speaker. The meter is irregular, ranging from two to six stresses per line in no fixed pattern. The longest lines are generally at the end of the three stanzas, but Donne's focus here is not on perfect regularity. The rhyme, however, never varies, each stanza running abba c d c d e e. The poet's tone is mocking and railing as it addresses the sun, covering an undercurrent of desperate, perhaps even obsessive love and grandiose ideas of what his lover is.

The poet personifies the sun as a "busy old fool" (line 1). He asks why it is shining in and disturbing "us" (4), who appear to be two lovers in bed. The sun is peeking through the curtains of the window of their bedroom, signaling the morning and the end of their time together. The speaker is annoyed, wishing that the day has not yet come (compare Juliet's assurances that it is certainly not the morning, in [Romeo and Juliet](#) III.v). The poet then suggests that the sun go off and do other things rather than disturb them, such as going to tell the court huntsman that it is a day for the king to hunt, or to wake up ants, or to rush late schoolboys and apprentices to their duties. The poet wants to know why it is that "to thy motions lovers' seasons run" (4). He imagines a world, or desires one, where the embraces of lovers are not relegated only to the night, but that lovers can make their own time as they see fit.

In the second stanza the poet continues to mock the sun, saying that its "beams so reverend and strong" are nothing compared to the power and glory of their love. He boasts that he "could eclipse and cloud them [the sunbeams] with a wink." In a way this is true; he can cut out the sun from his view by closing his eyes. Yet, the lover doesn't want to "lose her sight so long" as a wink would take. The poet is emphasizing that the sun has no real power over what he and his lover do, while he is the one who chooses to allow the sun in because by it he can see his lover's beauty.

The lover then moves on to loftier claims. "If her eyes have not blinded thine" (13) implies that his beloved's eyes are more brilliant than sunlight. This was a standard Renaissance love-poem convention (compare Shakespeare "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun" in Sonnet 130) to proclaim his beloved's loveliness. Indeed, the sun should "tell me/Whether both th'Indias of spice and mine/Be where thou lef'st them, or lie here with me." Here, Donne lists wondrous and

exotic places (the Indias are the West and East Indies, well known in Donne's time for their spices and precious metals) and says that his mistress is all of those things: "All here in one bed lay" (20). "She's all states, and all princes I" (21). That is, all the beautiful and sovereign things in the world, which the sun meets as it travels the world each day, are combined in his mistress.

This is a monstrous, bold comparison, a hyperbole of the highest order. As usual, such an extreme comparison leads us to see a spiritual metaphor in the poem. As strong as the sun's light is, it pales in comparison to the spiritual light that shines from the divine and which brings man to love the divine.

The strange process of reducing the entire world to the bed of the lovers reaches its zenith in the last stanza: "In that the world's contracted thus" (26). Indeed, the sun need not leave the room; by shining on them "thou art everywhere" (29). The final line contains a play on the Ptolemaic astronomical idea that the Earth was the center of the universe, with the Sun rotating around the Earth: "This bed thy center is, these walls, thy spheare." Here Donne again gives ultimate universal importance to the lovers, making all the physical world around them subject to them.

This poem gives voice to the feeling of lovers that they are outside of time and that their emotions are the most important things in the world. There is something of the adolescent melodrama of first love here, which again suggests that Donne is exercising his intelligence and subtlety to make a different kind of point. While the love between himself and his lover may seem divine, metaphorically it can be true that divine love is more important than the things of this world.

The conflation of the earth into the body of his beloved is a little more difficult to understand. Donne would not be the first man who likened his female lover to a field to be sown by him, or a country to be ruled by him. Yet, if she represents the world because [God](#) loves the world, is Donne really putting himself, as the one who loves, in the position of [God](#)?

What we can say with some firmness is that the sun, which marks the passage of earthly time, is rejected as an authority. The "seasons" of lovers (with the pun on the seasons of the earth, also ruled by the sun) should not be ruled by the movements of the sun. There should be nothing above the whims and desires of lovers, as they feel, and on the spiritual level the sun is just one more creation of God; all time and physical laws are subject to God.

That the sun, of course, will not heed a man's insults and orders is tacitly acknowledged. It will continue on its way each day, and one cannot wink it out of existence. There is nothing that the poet can do to change the movements of the sun or the coming of the day, no matter how clever his comparisons. From his perspective, the whole world is right there with him, yet he knows that his perspective is limited. This conceit of railing against the sun and denying the reality of the world outside the bedroom closes the poem with a more heartfelt (and more believable) assertion that the "bed thy center is." It can be imagined that here he is speaking more to himself, realizing that the time he has with his lover is more important to him than anything else in his life in this moment, even while the spiritual meaning of the poem extends to the sun's relatively weak power compared with the cosmic forces of the divine.

## John Donne: Poems Questions and Answers

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### [A valediction forbidding mourning](#)

The final three stanzas use an extended metaphor in which Donne compares the two individuals in the marriage to the two legs of a compass: though they each have their own purpose, they are inextricably linked at the joint or pivot at the top—that...



Asked by Aya K #575784

Answered by Aslan 4 days ago 11/12/2016 11:23 PM [View All Answers](#)

### [Death](#)

Death is a common image in Donne's poetry. Rather than a sad ending, Donne looked at death as a moment of change: a time of transition. Consider his poem "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning." "In this poem Donne describes leaving his wife as a form...



Asked by Wu T #571080

Answered by Aslan 15 days ago 11/1/2016 4:12 PM [View All Answers](#)

### [Meaning of each of these sentences in John Donnes poem "The First Anniversary"](#)

I'm sorry, this is a short-answer forum. You'll need to ask your questions separately.

As for the first quote, Donne is essentially saying that for every new philosophy we accept, prior beliefs must be questioned.



Asked by Jamil A #549959

Answered by jill d #170087 2 months ago 9/2/2016 6:53 PM [View All Answers](#)

The final three stanzas use an extended metaphor in which Donne compares the two individuals in the marriage to the two legs of a compass: though they each have their own purpose, they are inextricably linked at the joint or pivot at the top—that is, in their spiritual unity in God. Down on the paper—the earthly realm—one leg stays firm, just as Donne's wife will remain steadfast in her love at home. Meanwhile the other leg describes a perfect circle around this unmoving center, so long as the center leg stays firmly grounded and does not stray. She will always lean in his direction, just like the center leg of the compass. So long as she does not stray, "Thy firmness makes my circle just, / And makes me end

where I begun," back at home (lines 35-36). They are a team, and so long as she is true to him, he will be able to return to exactly the point where they left off before his journey.

“**The Good-Morrow**” is a poem of twenty-one lines divided into three stanzas. The poet addresses the woman he loves as they awaken after having spent the night together.

The poem begins with a direct question from the poet to the woman. Deliberately exaggerating, the poet expresses his conviction that their lives only began when they fell in love. Before, they were mere babies at their mothers’ breasts or were indulging in childish “country pleasures.” This phrase had a double edge in John Donne’s time: it would have been understood as a reference to gross sexual gratification. Perhaps, the poet continues, they were asleep in the Seven Sleepers’ den (referring to an ancient Syrian legend in which persecuted Christians slept for several hundred years in a cave near Ephesus). He asserts that compared with their true love (“this”), all past pleasures have been merely “fancies,” and the women he “desir’d, and got” were only a “dream” of this one woman.

The second stanza opens with a triumphant greeting to their souls as they awaken into a constant, trusting love. They have no need to keep a jealous eye on each other because their love subdues the desire to look for other partners; it is so complete, so self-sufficient, that it “makes one little room, an everywhere.”

The emphasis moves to the external world that the lovers have abandoned for each other. The poet contrasts the physical worlds sought by...

Transcript of the  
The Good

-

## Morrow Lecture.

Welcome. I am Dr Andrew Barker and this is the Mycroft Lecture on John Donne’s  
The Good Morrow

The Good Morrow  
is an aubade. This is a poem written in the morning, a  
song of the morning. The poet is addressing a young lady that he has just spent the night  
with, and whatever has transpired the night before has either been some sensational sexual  
activity, or one of  
those life -  
changing, emotional experiences. Something has occurred  
between them that has changed the balance of their relationship and in the morning, John  
Donne addresses her with these words.

As a brief synopsis of his poetical background, Donne is one of the metaphysical  
poets. The metaphysical poets, another one being Andrew Marvell, whose work you may

come across. The metaphysical poets were a loosely connected group of writers from the 17th century, so we are post

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Shakespeare at the time when this poem is written, and the concerns of the metaphysical poets would be

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if I was to say, "Metaphysical poets tend to investigate the world through witty yet rational discussions of its phenomena, rather than by intuition or mysticism": that pretty much sums up what the metaphysical poets were trying to do. Wittily assess the phenomena of the modern world, not through a mystical way of looking at it, but that this is what is actually going on in the world as we experience and see

it. The brilliant critic Dr. Johnson wasn't overly flattering about the metaphysical poets. He was to say of them, and I'll read this out to you: "The metaphysical poets were men of learning, and, to show their learning was their whole endeavour; but, unluckily resolving to show it in rhyme, instead of writing poetry, they only wrote verses, and, very often, such verses as stood the trial of the finger better than of the ear; for the modulation was so imperfect, that they were only found to be verses by counting the syllables. The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions; their learning instructs, and their subtlety surprises; but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought, and, though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased."

Well, perhaps Johnson has a point here, but of this quite famous synopsis of what the metaphysical poets do, we can ask whether it applies to the specific poem that we are looking

at here,

The Good Morrow

. Now, the way I will introduce

The Good Morrow

to you, I will

read it through. I will then do the sentence

-

by

-

sentence paraphrasing of what Donne is saying in the poem.

I will then leave one of the lines

of the poem out. For teachers who may wish to

introduce this to a class, there's a certain crassness to it which you might not feel happy about introducing to younger students. So I'll leave that to the end, and you can cut that piece out if you so choose

e. But since it is there in the poem, it would be remiss of me not to mention that section. What I'm going to point out to you is actually there in Donne's intent. And finally, I will give a synopsis of Donne's overall idea of what has happened between last night and the way he sees himself as he looks at the girl in the morning, saying this beautiful poem to her.

So this is the first read

-

through of John Donne's  
The Good

-

Morrow

.

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I  
Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned  
till then?

But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?

5

you plight your troth to show your honesty. So he's saying, 'I want to lay my cards on the table here. I'm really interested in knowing what you and I were doing until we fell in love.'

Now, the implication is that something has happened and that that something has recently changed their relationship to change the nature of their love.

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I did till we  
loved?

Were we not weaned till then

?

he asks.

'Weaned' is what you do to a baby when it is being breast

-

fed and you want to feed

the baby cow milk. So to move the baby from breast milk to cow milk, you wean the baby off the mother's breast. And Donne is

using it specifically as a metaphor for ageing. For

going from childishness into adulthood. Now of course it's not a perfect metaphor because you don't wean a child into it becoming an adult, you wean a baby into it becoming a child.

But we can understand

what he's getting at here. He wants to show that previous to this experience that they have had, they were children

-

unsophisticated, babyish, and now

something has happened which has changed them into being older.

Were

we not weaned till then

?

he

asks.

But suck'd on country pleasures childishly

?

So whatever the pleasures they have had before this new experience has befallen them, they were children, they

weren't weaned. They hadn't yet loved. I'll come back to that

line, incidentally. But 'sucked on country pleasures childishly'. 'Sucked' is still alluding to breast

-

feeding, I think. We

sucked on country pleasures childishly

.

Or snorted we in the Seven S

leepers' den

?

'The Seven Sleepers' den' could be one of the examples of this gratuitous learning that Dr. Johnson seems to dislike so much, so heaven knows what he would have made of T.S.

Elliot and Ezra Pound. The Seven Sleepers' den is a Catholic story

whereby there are a group

of children who are undergoing some persecution and they hide in the Seven Sleepers' den

and then hundreds of years later, they awaken to a new world. The use of this story to Donne

6

here is that they are children, the Seven Sleep

ers are children when they are in the den, in the

Seven Sleepers' den. And when they awake, when they come out of the den, they awake to a

new world. And that's what he's looking at here. He and the girl are, he sees, children, or like

children. And someth

ing has happened to make them awake to a new world.

Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den

, he says, as well. 'Snorted' has the

connotation of animals. I always think of pigs when I think of 'snorted'. And Seven Sleepers

den

-

a den is a place where a f

ox or an animal lives. It's as if Donne is saying 'Prior to this

moment, we were childish animals. But something has happened to change that.' And he's

asked these questions. So I'll read it through again up to this point. And the questions he's

asked are:

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I did till we loved?

Were we not weaned till then?

But suck'd on country pleasures childishly?

Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den?

Four questions, he asks. And then he says, 'twas so'. Meaning he's asked the

four questions,

and he's answered, 'Yes', we were kids, we were children, we were animalistic children. This is true. "Twas so.'

It was so. He's asked the question and answered it.

But

this, all pleasures fancies be

, he tells her.

But this, all pleasure

s fancies be.

What

he means by this is that all of the previous pleasures that he has had, they have merely been fancies. 'Fancies' being night, small, but basically insignificant instances. Not something you don't enjoy, but something that doesn't really

carry any weight. He says, 'Yes, we did do this,

but all the pleasure we got from it was mere fancy'.

'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be. If ever any beauty I did see,

Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

What he means here, an

d this is a slightly complicated line, with a lot built into it, but not too difficult for us, I think.

If ever any beauty I did see, which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

7

He is saying, 'All the beauty that I have seen up to this point

-

,

Let's be specific here. There are two ways of reading this line, and I'll show you them both.

The first is,

If ever any beauty I did see

-

and by beauty here, he means

-

'anything

beautiful that I've ever observed up to this point in my life (like a sunse  
t), all the beauty that

I've seen up to this point in my life

'twas but a dream of thee.

Everything beautiful I've seen

was a preparation for the beauty that I see in you now. I was looking at other beauties, and I was dreaming of the beauty that I was go

ing to see when I look at you.' He was in a sort of

pre

-

cognitive state. So 'beauty' here is world beauties. Anything beautiful.

But the other way of looking at it, and the other way I think is more fun and more realistic, though not specifically more

romantic perhaps, is that he is basically saying, 'Any

beauty that I did see, which I desired and got, so any beautiful woman that I've seen up to this point in my life, that I fancied, that I desired and got, I seduced and had sex with, really, all

the ot

her women that I've known up to this point in my life were but a dream of you. They were insignificant compared to you because there is something about you that is so special that I was looking for it, dreaming of it in every other woman I've ever met.'

It

's a lovely sentiment, I'm sure.

Whether a woman would actually buy that if she heard it is a different matter altogether. 'Every single other beautiful woman I've ever seduced in my life, every woman I've ever slept with, really, I was just dreaming of you, as I looked at them, because you are

so perfect that I was searching for that beauty that you possess when I was with them.'

I think the other reference we have to bring into this here is Plato's allegory of 'the cave'. And Plato's cave allegory is th

at human beings are on the floor of the cave and they

cannot see the sun above them, because they can only see a wall of the cave, and they see the sun reflected onto the wall of the cave, and they can see reflections of things that stand before the sun, b

ut not the things themselves. So, the idea is you never see anything perfect. You

can merely see reflections of the perfect bodies that are actually there in the light of the sun.

And what Donne seems to be

-

and I'm fairly certain is

-

alluding to here is

that he's seeing

the girl as one of the perfect bodies as allegorized by Plato and the cave. And every other girl that he's ever met is merely the reflection of her on the cave wall. Whether the young lady is flattered by this display of his learning and

eloquence remains to be seen. But that's one of

the things he's alluding to, and perhaps one of the things that Johnson himself finds a rather

8

gratuitous display of learning.

So that's the first stanza for us, and I'll read that through one more time, because the

second stanza is going to start with a change.

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I

Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then?

But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?

Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den?

'Twas so; but this, a

ll pleasures fancies be.

If ever any beauty I did see,

Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

Why I think, incidentally, that this has to be about a woman, other women, is because you can't really

get

a sunset. When he says 'other beauties I did see which I desired and got', it has to be a type of beauty that you can want and get. And a woman fits that bill perfectly as far as the rhetoric of this poem goes.

So we'll now start the second stanza, which begins with:

An

d now good morrow to our waking souls

'Good morrow', of course, means, 'good morning'. It also means 'the good morning', this morning which we have arisen in is good. But essentially, it means good morning. 'And now, good morning to our waking souls.'

So the idea here is that our souls are awake on this day. Meaning that previously, our souls were asleep. 'And now, good morning to this new dimension in our relationship.'

I'm not a big fan of poets using the word 'souls' because I think the word can be used

very loosely, and almost very cheaply to just try and signify that something more significant has happened. A change has happened which has made life more significant. Particularly if you don't particularly believe in a soul as something that can be defined. The poem can take on a quasi

-

religious element as soon as people start talking about the soul. However, it's easy for us to understand what Donne is getting at here. 'Previous to whatever happened last night, we were kids enjoying animalistic, childish pleasures. And now, something has happened that has made our relationship and our love for each other more sophisticated.'

9

And now good

-

morrow to our waking souls,

Which watch not one another out of fear;

Which is a rather strange line. He is saying 'Now we don't look at each other out of fear. So presumably, previously, they were looking at each other out of fear. And fear of what? Fear of physical violence to each other? That seems highly unlikely. The only fear that

I think fits this is the fear of betrayal, or the fear of one person leaving the other.

'Now good morrow to our waking souls, and now our souls don't look at each other out of fear. There is now nothing for us to fear in each other'.

And Don

ne now comes up with one of those beautiful lines, one of those lines that guys should remember to try and impress women with. It's

For love all love of other sights controls,

And makes one little room an everywhere.

It's a beautiful idea this.

For lo

ve all love of other sights controls

.

It means that somebody in love sees with the eyes of a lover, and the eyes of a lover see things differently from other people. I suppose the easy way, the almost clichéd way of rephrasing this, would be

-

a lover see  
s things through rose

-

tinted spectacles. Thomas

Aquinas has this lovely line where he says something like, 'What we perceive is not reality, but reality seen through our method of reasoning.' And the method of reasoning that a lover employs is always to se

e the world much more highlighted, much more bright, much more interesting. As a place that he can be much more concerned with.

For love all love of other sights controls,  
And makes one little room an everywhere.

To a lover with the person he or she l  
oves, the little room that they are in is

everywhere. Nothing else matters outside of that room. Ezra Pound sums this situation up in one of his poems

The Garrett

, where he says something like:

10

I am near my desire,  
nor has life in it aught better  
than

this moment of clear coolness,  
this moment of waking together.

The moment when you wake up next to the person you're in love with, that's as good as life gets. And that's what has just happened to John Donne here. He looks at her, and he looks around th

e room, and he realizes that all he wants is in that room. He doesn't need to be anywhere else.

And remember, this is written at a time of vast discoveries. Sea voyages to discover, stamp, file, and number different countries and cultures. But Thomas isn't concerned with that. And this is an exciting time in Western culture. But Donne isn't concerned with that, or

so he tells the girl. He tells the girl, 'All we need to be interested in, or all we should be interested in, is this room, and each other'.

F

or love all love of other sights controls,  
And makes one little room an everywhere.

It's a bea

autiful line. Donne continues with the conceit. He says,

Let sea

-  
discoverers to new worlds have gone,  
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown.  
So, let the adventurers of our age go and discover new worlds over the seas. Let them  
make maps of other  
worlds on worlds. Donne doesn't mean worlds as planets here. He means  
worlds -  
although astronomy was around  
- he means worlds as different cultures, different  
countries. If he'd said 'places', it would be more specific and easier for us to understand.  
'Let maps to other places on places have shown'. But that wouldn't quite work so well as for the  
final line, where he says

-  
and this is a rather complicated sentiment as well, but not beyond  
our capabilities to understand

-  
Let us possess one world, each h  
ath one, and is one

.  
So, although the big discoveries of our age are not being made in this room, they are  
11  
being made by sea

-  
voyages, let us possess one world, that being the room. But I would  
suggest that in  
let us possess one world, each hath one, and  
is one

, what he is alluding to here  
is the idea that, 'you are all the world to me'. D.H. Lawrence has an idea somewhere where he  
says, 'the soul of one man and one woman makes one angel'. And it's that kind of thing that  
Donne is alluding to here. 'We two  
are one. You are one person, I am one person, or you  
have one world, I have one world, but when we are together, those two worlds become one  
world.'

Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown;  
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.

Ea  
ch has a world of its own, and together, we are a world on our own. I'll read that  
stanza through one more time.  
And now good

-  
morrow to our waking souls,  
Which watch not one another out of fear;  
For love, all love of other sights controls,  
And makes one  
little room an everywhere.

Let sea

-

discoverers to new worlds have gone,  
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown,  
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.  
The rest of the world doesn't matter. There is just me and you.

The third stanza

begins with another one of those beautiful lines.  
My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,  
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest  
It's the first one of those lines that I think is so good.  
My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears.  
What yo

u have to imagine is two lovers looking directly into each other's eyes. And  
he is seeing his face in her eyeball, and she is seeing her face in his eyeball.

12

My

face in thine eye, thine in mine appears

.

It's a beautiful line. And Donne continues with t  
his by saying,

And true plain hearts do in those faces rest

.

I'd have to point out here, I don't think this line is as good.

And true plain hearts do in those faces rest

He sees his face in her eye. Or she sees her face in his eye. And he says,

And

true

plain hearts do in those faces rest.

Well, plainly he means, 'And it's obvious that we honestly  
love each other'. That's the point that he's getting across. 'And true hearts'

-

good. 'Plain

hearts?' 'Plain' is a rather unfortunate word there. 'Plain'

has a connotation of ordinary. And I

don't think he means to imply that means ordinarily honest. Ordinary seems out of place, or  
'plain' seems out of place in any love poem of this sort, but

t

ue plain hearts do in those faces

rest.

Also, as a metaphor, i

t's rather dodgy, isn't it? Because if you take it literally, true plain

hearts do in faces rest, they look in each other's faces, and they see their hearts in their faces.

It's a gratuitous image. It would look like something out of Salvador Dali if you t

ook it

literally. And often we have to take the metaphor literally before we look at the metaphorical

element of it. When metaphors work very well they have to work as a literal statement, and then work as a metaphorical statement. And that one doesn't really.

And true plain hearts do  
in those faces rest

. But anyway, we know exactly what he means, so there's no real problem for us with it.

Where can we find two better hemispheres  
, he continues. What he means by  
where  
can we find two better hemispheres

-  
a

hemisphere is half a sphere. So the hemispheres he is talking about are the hemispheres of their eyes. If you imagine a sphere being cut down the centre, that hemisphere would be the hemisphere of the eye. Of her eyes and his eyes. And of course, the other

hemispheres he could be talking about would be the hemispheres of the planet, the northern hemisphere and the southern hemisphere. The hemispheres of the whole planet aren't as good as what he sees in her eyes, or her eyes, because what he sees in her eye

s is actually him. But she sees herself in his eyes as well. And this oneness connection is showing how close they are, or how close he wants to present them as being to him. 'There's nothing more important in the world than us two.'

I'll just point out he  
re actually, I didn't do it earlier, but the line  
Let us possess one  
world, each hath one, and is one

. This whole 'we two are one' idea. I think it's easy to see that as somewhat of a cliché. 'You and I are one person.' I would understand if someone were to

hear that thinking, 'Well that's rather a greeting card idea'. And maybe it is, but remember this was written 400 or 500 years ago. It's pretty difficult for us to read something from that age when we've had 500 years more writing done by people who have used those same ideas

that John Donne came up with all that time ago. Presumably when he came up with this idea, it wasn't quite so clichéd. The critic James Wood has an interesting statement on clichés in writing, or clichés in similes, whereby he says

the reason they become clichés, or the reason clichés become clichés, is not because they don't work, it's because they do work. The first person who said, 'This is as cold as snow', probably thought he was making a very accurate and perceptive comparison.

So when Donne says, 'We two are one, we two are one person', this was probably considered to be a very original statement. And nonetheless, it's a nice statement and we enjoy hearing it.

Where can we find two better hemispheres

Without sharp north, without declining west?  
he tells us.

The point he is making here is he wants to say something derogatory, well not derogatory, but diminishing about the world, to show why the hemispheres of the two lovers' eyes are more important than the hemispheres of the planet. And he hits upon the fact that the hemispheres on the planet have a declining west. So the sun rises in the east, goes down in the west, that's what he means by 'declining west'. He doesn't really say anything derogatory about the hemispheres of the planet, but he's got to come up with something. And in 'sharp north', presumably, he means the needle on a compass points upright towards north, and that's a bit sharp. Perhaps that's what he means. But the sharp north and declining west are just the

reason for him to say things that enable him to make the hemispheres of the two lovers' eyes appear more important than the hemispheres of the whole planet.

And he now gives us his final line.

Whatever dies, was not mixed equally;

If our two loves be one, or

, thou and I

Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.

14

And this is slightly complicated.

What

ever dies, was not mixed equally.

Now, the poem was written at a time when medical practice often believed that death was caused by an imbalance of the

four humours. And as long as your humours were balanced,

you would live. When they were out of balance, you would die. So things die when they're not balanced properly. Whatever the historical reasoning behind that, it's easy for us to

understand the sentiment

that whatever dies, dies because it is not balanced properly. And

this sentiment is very useful for Donne in the love poem, because he's saying, 'our love has to be balanced properly'. He says,

If our two loves be one, or thou and I

Love so alike that

none can slacken, none can die.

Now, if I paraphrase this, he's saying, in

If our two loves be one

, 'If you love me as

much as I love you,'

If our two loves be one, and thou and I love so alike that none can slacken

, 'If you love me as much as I love

you, and we both continue to love each other as

much as I love you at the moment, none can die.'

None can die  
would either mean we will live forever, or it would mean our love will  
live forever.

But I think this final line raises a very interesting point,  
that often goes unremarked  
upon in discussion of this poem, that is to do with the response of the girl to what Donne is  
saying. And we don't know what that is. Now, obviously, something very powerful, very  
emotionally changing has occurred to Donne the night  
before, whatever it may be. For he  
says at the start of the second stanza,  
And now good

-

morrow to our waking souls

. But he's

speaking for both of them there. It's '

our

waking souls', not '

my

waking soul'. But how does

he really know whether the emotions

that he feels are as powerful for the girl as they are for  
him?

And of course, he doesn't.

He's being rather presumptuous in saying 'our waking souls'. But of course, to  
convince the girl that he is in love with her, and that something has changed for  
him, if he

just said, 'And now good morrow to

my

waking soul', it wouldn't sound as good, so he has to

15

convince the girl in as well. Now, whenever we hear a beautiful love poem like this, we always  
think that the guy or the girl writing it deserves to be loved

in kind, and she or he is in fact

speaking for both partners. But there's no guarantee of that. For all we know, the girl may  
hear this and think or say, 'Yeah thanks John, actually it's a very nice thing to say in the  
morning, but honestly, last night w

asn't that great for me. Fun, but I've had better.' And John

goes away crying. Historically, we don't know whether that was the case. But remember, this  
is an address to the girl. Donne can't speak for the girl in this. And this idea of him trying to  
convince

the girl to love him as much as he loves her, or he claims to, is very relevant and  
apparent in the final lines.

If

our two loves be one.

If.

'If you love me as much as I love you.' Because he doesn't know how much the girl

loves him. He's pitchi  
ng this poem to her to, presumably, get her to say so.  
If our two loves be one, or thou and I  
Love so alike that none can slacken, none can die.  
'Our love will live forever, or we will live forever, if you love me as much as I love  
you.' And let's hope  
for his sake that she does.  
So I'll just drop back now to that third line,  
But suck'd on country pleasures  
childishly

.  
What Donne is alluding to here in 'sucked on country pleasures childishly' is female  
genitalia. In 'country pleasures', he is playin  
g on the sound of the word 'cunt'. Shakespeare  
does the same thing in Hamlet whereby Hamlet lies down in Ophelia's lap and, Ophelia is  
somewhat shocked by the fact he's doing it, and Hamlet says, did you think I meant 'country  
matters', by which he means m  
atters of the cunt. Now as crass as this may sound to a modern  
audience, we don't know whether the word had the same shock appeal then as it has now. But  
it is there in the poem.

The sound of the word is something that Donne is playing with. And he means  
16

vibrant, sexually

-  
aware pleasures presumably. Specific sexual pleasures. But not spiritually

-  
aware pleasure. When he says,  
good

-  
morrow to our waking souls  
, in this instance their souls  
are awake, and they are in love. Spiritually in love. That sort of love

. Prior to this, they had  
been sexually active, animalistic, childish. And something has happened for his opinion of  
the girl to have changed. And he's hoping she shares the same feelings.

So, 'sucked on country pleasures childishly'. For the full meaning  
of that line, he is

referring to female genitalia for the purpose of referring to sexual pleasures, which have now  
been transcended to the spiritual pleasures of their waking souls.

So when we look back to what Dr. Johnson said when I read out Johnson's  
overall

appraisal of the metaphysical poets at the start, one of Johnson's complaints is that there is a  
kind of gratuitous display of learning from the metaphysical poets which somehow jumps out  
at us too much. I'm not sure how much that is true of

The Go

od Morrow

. Maybe it is true of  
other metaphysical poets and other poems by John Donne. As far as we could really accuse  
The Good Morrow  
of suffering from gratuitous displays of learning, we have the Seven  
Sleepers' den, which we wouldn't know; the Plato ca  
ve analogy, which perhaps we may not  
know, but we're pretty sure is there; we have the knowledge that sea

-

discovery is happening  
around that time, but who at the time when the poem was written would not know that; and  
also the now out

-

of

-

date medical analy  
sis of the humours. 'Whatever dies was not mixed  
equally.' So I don't particularly see this as an unusually high frame of reference for Dr.  
Johnson to get too excited about. I think Donne in this poem is exempt from the criticisms  
Johnson makes.

I'll read

the poem through one more time. This is John Donne's

The Good Morrow

final read

-

through.

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I  
Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then?  
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?  
Or snorted we in the Seven  
Sleepers' den?  
'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.  
If ever any beauty I did see,  
Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.  
And now good

-

morrow to our waking souls,  
Which watch not one another out of fear;  
For love, all love of other s  
ights controls,  
And makes one little room an everywhere.  
Let sea

-

discoverers to new worlds have gone,  
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown,  
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.  
My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,

And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;  
Where can we find two better hemispheres,  
Without sharp north, without declining west?  
Whatever dies, was not mixed equally;  
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I  
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can  
die.

That was the Mycroft Online Lecture on John Donne's  
The Good

-

Morrow.

I am Dr. Andrew Barker. Thank you, goodbye.

Dr

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