

Poetry
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Lecture 18
John Donne – 01

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John Donne (1572-1631)



- Historical and Literary Context
- John Donne
- Poet and Priest
- "Death, be not proud, though some have called thee"
- "I am a little world made cunningly"
- "The Sun Rising"
- Analysis
- A Historical Reading
- An Ecofeminist Reading



Hello, the best exemplar of metaphysical poetry is of course John Donne who was born in 1572 in the Elizabethan period continued to live in the early 17th century in both King James I period and also in King Charles I period. We will look into such historical and literary context first, see John Donne the poet and priest. We will read two poems first; these are sonnets; "Death, be not proud, though some have called thee," "I am a little world made cunningly," this is a second sonnet, these are called holy sonnets. We will pay more attention to one poem "The Sun Rising," analyze it and then offer two readings, one is historical, another is an ecofeminist reading.

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Historical and Literary Context



- Conflict between the Catholic and Protestant factions – suspicion and persecution – exile
- The King's need to pacify both groups and remain in power
- Conversions: Donne from RC to Anglican Church
- Educated youth's aspiration to obtain a government position or become a priest
- Colonial and imperial expansions; investors
- Continuation of the Elizabethan stalwarts: dramatic poets



The historical and literary context in which John Donne operated was full of conflict between the Catholics and the Protestants. They suspected each other and they were persecuting each other and some of them were hiding or going into exile. The King's need to pacify both groups and remain in power was something no one would envy.

There were of course conversions from one group to another. In the case of John Donne, we find him to convert himself from Roman Catholic Church to Anglican Church. He was educated well and he had an aspiration to obtain a government position or become a priest. He had to suffer a lot because he could not get both easily. At this time, we find colonial and imperial expansions.

John Donne also wanted to join this trading companies in America, but he could not succeed. And at this time also we find many of those Elizabethan writers writing different kinds of literary pieces including dramatic poetry.

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John Donne (1572-1631)



- Born in a mercantile Catholic family
- Suffered discrimination on account of his religion.
- Pursued law; joined Lord Essex (1596 at Cadiz) in his expeditions
- Loved **Anne More**, a kin of his boss Lord Egerton
- Secretly married her in 1601
- Suffered imprisonment, poverty and neglect
- Turned to asceticism and intellectual pursuits
- Genres: Sermons, Satires, Lyrics, Sonnets, Elegies



John Donne was born in a mercantile family that practiced Catholic religion. As a Catholic, he was discriminated on account of his own religious practice. He wanted to pursue law and joined Lord Essex in his military expeditions. What happened was he loved one lady called Anne More, she was a relative of his boss Lord Egerton. And he secretly married her in 1601. As a consequence, he had to suffer many deprivations including imprisonment, poverty and neglect. As a result, he turned to asceticism and followed intellectual pursuits. And as part of his negotiating with the difficult times that he had to live through he experimented with different forms of writings, sermons, satires, lyrics, sonnets, elegies and so on.

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Priest and Poet

- Converted to the Church of England
 - In 1615 James I appointed him a preacher, facilitated the award of DD by Cambridge, and later offered him the Deanship of St Paul's Cathedral
 - Donne enthralled his audience as a preacher.
 - His structure: explication, illustration, and application.
 - A bold and original experimental poet in style.
 - *Satires and Elegies, Songs and Sonnets, Sermons*
 - *Collected Poems* published posthumously in 1633.
- Poems: Two sonnets and "The Sun Rising"



When he did not get any government job, he accepted the minimum thing that he could do that is to become a priest. But priesthood did not prevent him from writing poetry. To become the priest, he had to convert himself to the Church of England. In 1615 the King James I appointed him a preacher and also helped him to get this doctor of divinity award from Cambridge University.

Later King James I also offered him a coveted post, that is, the Deanship of Saint Paul's Cathedral. John Donne was an excellent orator, a preacher, so he enthralled his audience as a preacher. He became very successful because he was using a particular structure for his sermons. Perhaps that could be a model for many of us.

He would take a passage from the Bible, explicate the Bible passage, illustrate it from various sources and then apply the ideas from the Bible to real life situations. So, this is a tripoded structure that he used in his sermons: explication, illustration and application. He was a bold and original experimental poet in his own inimitable style.

He published some poems but many of his poems were published not in his lifetime but after his death. Satires and Elegies, songs and sonnets, sermons, his collected poems they were all published in 1633. We will discuss two sonnets as we mentioned, we will also examine one particular poem "The Sun Rising."

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Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.



Even today death is the greatest theme for literature for poets, for everybody. That is the reality that all of us have to live through. John Donne was very aware of the presence of death in his life. So, here is a remarkable poem on the theme of death, he addresses death directly with so much of optimism.

“Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou does overthrow
Die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men will thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,

And poppy or charms can make as sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.”

Here he addresses death directly with so much of determination, courage to say ‘Death thou shalt die.’ This is a kind of declaration that he makes in his poem, in his sonnet, a very famous sonnet.

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I am a little world made cunningly
Of elements and an angelic sprite,
But black sin hath betray'd to endless night
My world's both parts, and oh both parts must die.
You which beyond that heaven which was most high
Have found new spheres, and of new lands can write,
Pour new seas in mine eyes, that so I might
Drown my world with my weeping earnestly,
Or wash it, if it must be drown'd no more.
But oh it must be burnt; alas the fire
Of lust and envy have burnt it heretofore,
And made it fouler; let their flames retire,
And burn me O Lord, with a fiery zeal
Of thee and thy house, which doth in eating heal.



Now, let us see another sonnet where he says,

“I am a little world made cunningly
Of elements and an angelic sprite,
But black sin hath betray'd to endless night
My world's both parts, and oh both parts must die.
You which beyond that heaven which was most high
Have found new spheres, and of new lands can write,

Pour new seas in mine eyes, that so I might
Drown my world with my weeping earnestly,
Or wash it, if it must be drown'd no more.
But oh it must be burnt; alas the fire
Of lust and envy have burnt it heretofore,
And made it fouler; let their flames retire,
And burn me O Lord, with a fiery zeal
Of thee and thy house, which doth in eating heal.”

This is a world that he creates himself cunningly, the metaphysical aspect of addressing death so closely and here addressing the lord so casually, suggesting the idea of religious resurrection and also living in poetry forever.

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The Sun Rising, Stanza I

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.**



Here is this poem ‘The Sun Rising.’ We have three stanzas, so one after another we will see these three stanzas. We have to remember those features of metaphysical poetry; we can see

them easily here. This casual colloquial plain language, far-fetched metaphor and all the paradoxical language, argumentative language and all that we can see in this poem.

“Busy old fool, unruly sun,

Why dost thou thus,

Through windows, and through curtains call on us?

Must do 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.”

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The Sun Rising, Stanza II

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.



The second stanza,

“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 lefts 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.”

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The Sun Rising, Stanza III



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.



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The third stanza,

“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.”

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Questions for Discussion



1. What is the title of the poem?
2. What does the whole poem deal with?
3. How does the poem begin?
4. How does it progress?
5. How does it end?
6. What linguistic and rhetorical strategies does the poet employ to achieve his effect on the reader?
7. What is the tone of the poem to the idea of love, the sun, the world, and the reader?
8. Why is the woman silent?



We have a list of questions for discussion for better understanding of this poem. What is the title of the poem? The Sun Rising. What does the whole poem deal with? Theme of love, there is an interaction between the poet and the sun; the sun is addressed by the poet directly, the lover is there along with him.

How does a poem begin? The poet addresses the sun directly, busy old fool. How does it progress? The poet piles up images after images to suggest that his world is better than the world visited by the sun. How does it end? He tells the sun to warm up his own bed and he could find everything here itself.

What linguistic and rhetorical strategies does the poet employ to achieve his effect on the reader? Of course, the features that we have identified colloquial language, metaphorical images, paradoxical images or language, familiarity with the sun, everything he brings them together here.

What is the tone of the poem? Conversational tone of course. Love, sun, world and reader all are brought together. There is a world that we can see; there is a stage on which the world of love is brought before us. We have one question for which we do not have an answer: Why is the woman silent? One thing that we can say is this is a poem written by a man. So, the woman does not have some voice we can say.

At the same time, we have to think about the colonial context, the imperial context in which Donne was writing. Britishers were expanding themselves, they were conquering every other land that was possible for them. So, conquering the earth has something to do with the woman as well. Colonizing, conquering the earth is part of this silencing one huge voice of women.

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Thematic Contrast

- Love and God
- Time and Destiny
- Man and Sun/ Nature/Land
- The Individual and the State
- East and West
- Empire and Colony
- Man and Woman
- Protestant and Catholic
- Science and Religion: geocentric, heliocentric, theocentric, erocentric worlds



If we follow our opposition strategy of looking at the thematic contrast in the poem, we can see, love and god, time - destiny, man, sun, that is nature and humanity or culture, the individual and the state, east and west. Remember Donne mentions 'Indias of spice and mine.' Empire and colony, that is Britain and rest of the areas. Man and woman, of course the woman is there, though silent.

We also have the background context of Protestant and Catholic. Most importantly we have this interplay between science and religion. We have to always remember that John Donne was interested in science; he was a priest; he was interested in government; he was interested in ordinary way of life; he loved a woman with all his heart and married her secretly against the wishes of his own boss and suffered enormously.

He was interested in the various kinds of conceptions of the earth, geocentric universe, heliocentric universe, he was interested in and he was also exploring the theocentric universe. That is, God made the whole world. But we notice something very interesting; erocentric world we can say, we can play with as Donne does 'e u r o' euro, European world, 'e r o' from eras; European imperial and eras, erocentric we can notice within this poem. The bed on which he stays and he wants a sun to bless him with light, warmth, everything for his own happiness.

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Poetic Devices

- **Apostrophe:** address to the sun
- **Personification:** The sun as an old man
- **Oxymoron:** Busy old fool
- **Rhetorical Question:** "Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?"
- **Images:** school boys, apprentices, huntsmen, king, ants, rags of time
- **Conceit:** extended metaphor; the sun's rays
- **Wit:** Far-fetched comparison: eclipsing the sun
- **Hyperbole:** th' Indias of spice and mine
- **Pun:** son/sun, mine



Many poetic devices are there in this poem of 30 lines. Apostrophe is the first one we can notice, there is a direct address to the sun. We have the sun being personified as an old man. We also

have oxymoronic language, paradoxical language as busy old fool, an old person is not so busy, but you can see busy old fool.

We have the case of a rhetorical question, “must to thy motion’s lovers’ seasons run?” Donne emphatically says, no, you do your job, we do our job. And there are many images in terms of metaphors and things like that, school boys, apprentices, huntsmen, king, ants, rags of time. The conceit is an extended metaphor: the sun's rays is something very interesting here. Donne says, he could eclipse the sun with a wink but he does not want to do it because he does not want to take away his eyes from his own beloved. He wants to keep his eye fixed on his beloved and so he does not want to look at the rays of the sun. This is a kind of wit, intellectually witty comparison, far-fetched comparison that we can see.

Also, we notice hyperbole, when it comes to comparing his own love with the Indias of spice and mine. Nothing in the world is so precious as his own love. On the one hand we can see materialistic love, expanding the world, conquering the world, bringing all wealth to England. On the other hand, Donne stays in London and he considered his own love to be the greatest wealth on the earth.

Obviously, he plays with the idea of sun, ‘son, sun.’ And also, he plays with mine, mining and taking some minerals from the mines and also mining his own bed; mining his own love and being happy with the resources, the riches that he gets out of his own love.

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Rhyme, Rhythm, and Meter



- **Rhyme:** ABBA CDCD EE; sun, thus, us, run, chide, prentices, ride, offices, clime, time
- **Rhythm:** variable line length and iambic meter
- Alternating tetrameter, dimeter and pentameter indicating the movement of the sun

Busy/ old fool/ unru/ly sun (8 syllables, 4 feet)

Trochee, spondee, iamb

DUMda, DUMDUM, daDUM, daDUM

Why dost/ thou thus (4 syllables, 2 feet)

DUMda, DUMda

Through windows, and through curtains call on us?
(10 syllables, 5 feet)



The Rhyme, Rhythm and Meter of this poem are interesting by themselves. We have three stanzas; each stanza has this rhyme scheme ABBA CDCD EE; so, 10 lines we have. The rhyming words are sun, thus, us, run, chide, prentice, ride, offices, clime, time. The rhythm is variable because the line lengths vary. But basically, we have iambic in this poem. What we have is alternating tetrameter, diameter and pentameter; tetra 4, dye 2, and penta 5. These alternating rhymes, meters indicate the movement of the sun going around the world.

Let us look at some examples for this variable meters. “Busy/ old fool/ unru/ly sun,” we have 8 syllables, 4 feet and we have trochee, spondee and iamb in the first line. We can read this in this way DUMda, DUMDUM, daDUM, daDUM, that is trochee, spondee and then iamb. The next example that we have is, “why dost/ thou thus.” It is a short line of 4 syllables and 2 feet. Here we have DUMda DUMda to mean trochee.

And we have another line where we have all 10 syllables and 5 feet. “Through windows, and through curtains, call on us? So, this kind of variety itself is indicative of the energy, the dynamism that Donne brings into the poem because the kind of love that he deals with is energetic love.

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Overall Impression



- Personification and presentation of the sun as a foolish old man throughout the poem: **a conceit**
- **Stanza I:** The speaker complains about the entry of the sun rays into his bedroom and chides the sun to go and leave him alone
- **Stanza II:** The speaker considers Love's riches more powerful than anything else.
- **Stanza III:** The speaker eclipses the sun into his bed, which is the centre of the universe for the lovers and the sun.
- The lovers's world is superior to all other worlds.



In this poem, we find personification and presentation of the sun as a foolish old man throughout the poem. It is a conceit; it is extended in many ways in three different stanzas. In stanza one, the speaker complains about the entry of the sun rays into his bedroom and chides rebukes the sun to go and leave him alone. And in stanza 2 the speaker considers love's riches to be more powerful than anything else in the world. And in stanza 3 the speaker eclipses the sun into his bed which is the center of the universe for the lovers and also in this universe he includes he co-opts the sun as well. What is the use of that heliocentric world, going around the world? Come here, to this 'ero' erocentric world. He says the lovers' world is superior to all other worlds. So, the sun rising is a full of energy touching the heart and mind of every reader who comes into contact with 'The sun Rising.'

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A Historical Reading



➤ "The Sun Rising"

- Pun on the sun as the son of King James I, Charles I
- King James I died in 1625
- Charles I was the first king to be born in the Protestant Church of England.
- Charles I was rising as an imperial king.
- He loved and listened to his wife but did not care much for his kingdom of the empire.
- He ruled the country without parliament for a decade.
- Science and trade were developing fast.
- Donne also secretly married Anne More and suffered deprivations in his life.



This is an interesting historical reading I have attempted on my own, without any critical reference. Some of you may try this. "The Sun Rising" is a poem that plays with the word sun in two different ways, one sun actually, the planet sun rising and 's o n' the son who is the result of the kind of relationship between a man and woman, some reproduction if you call it.

What I consider in this poem is this son, 's o n' is the son of King James I that is Charles I. When King James I died in 1625, his own son Charles I became the first King of England who was born in the Church of England, the Protestant Church of England, that is something remarkable we have to notice.

The king was rising as an imperial king. This personification, this symbol perhaps this address to the son may be an address to the king as well. This King Charles I loved his wife and listened to his wife and he did not pay much attention to the Kingdom or the Empire in the way in which he ought to have done.

What he did was he quarreled with the parliament. He did not convene the parliament for many years nearly a decade. And the Lords and Barrens, they became upset and they became restless and that is why they had to indulge in civil war with their own king. And the result finally was King Charles I was defeated and executed and then the people's government, that is the commonwealth government came into existence.

At this time science and trade were developing very fast and Donne also married Anne More secretly and suffered deprivations in his own life. So, this is the kind of historical reading that I thought would be interesting for us to look into, in this poem.

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An Ecofeminist Reading



- Men and women poets of the 17th century approached gender, nature, and colonialism differently
- Ecocriticism, postcolonialism, and ecofeminism create contexts of political activism about the metaphor of the earth as mother.
- Women and Earth: reproduction and nourishment
- **John Donne** was keenly interested in the Virginia Company which explored, enjoyed, and exploited both land and women.
- “The Sun Rising” is a text of colonization and mining.
- The woman/ land is East Indies of spice and West Indies of mineral wealth. (Phillips 2004)



We have another quite interesting reading of this poem called “An Echo feministic Reading” from one critic Phillips. From this essay what we find is this: Men and women poets of the 17th century approached gender, nature and colonialism differently. Ecocriticism, postcolonialism and ecofeminism all together create context of political activism about the metaphor of the earth as mother. Women and earth are connected in some way because of this capacity for reproduction and nourishment. John Donne the poet and priest was keenly interested in the Virginia Company which explored, enjoyed and exploited both land and women in America, in that colony called Virginia.

So, Phillips calls his poem “The Sun Rising” a text of colonization and mining; colonizing women, colonizing earth both go together according to him. The woman or land is East Indies of spice and West Indies of mineral wealth. By paying close attention to this poem with historical details Phillips offers this ecofeminist reading which you could appreciate.

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Summary



- Historical and Literary Context
- John Donne
- Priest and Poet
- "Death, be not proud, though some have called thee"
- "I am a little world made cunningly"
- "The Sun Rising"
- Analysis
- A Historical Reading
- An Ecofeminist Reading



Now, to sum up John Donne, the 17th century poet, priest has written a number of poems and we have chosen two sonnets and one song or one poem in general for our study in this lecture. We referred to "Death, be not proud, though some have called thee." We also read "I am a little world made cunningly." These two poems, sonnets are at the back of my mind when we read any kind of poem with some kind of metaphysical strain. Particularly Emily Dickinson will come to us when we read this poem "I am a little world made cunningly." We examine "The Sun Rising" closely and offered a historical reading and also an ecofeminist reading.

When we read the poems of John Donne we come into contact with his own voice, with his own speech, pattern. He addresses the sun directly. We participate in this poem as implied listeners. We see the stage; we see the drama of love enacted in front of our eyes. Some references will help you to understand John Donne and this particular poem much more.

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If you are interested in exploring the echo feministic dimension a little more, perhaps you could refer to this article by B Phillips. This is called "The Rape of Mother Earth in 17th Century English Poetry: An Ecofeminist Interpretation." Thank you.