

This sample essay on the poem 'The Sun Rising' by John Donne mainly concerns the key themes and imagery in the poem. Many an essay has been written about its key themes of Love, Time, Space, Measurement, Astrology, Astronomy, Age and Youth. The poem revolves, on the surface, about Donne's attitude towards the sun. Right from the start, from the very first words, the reader is left in no doubt as to Donne's opinion of the sun on this occasion and it isn't very flattering. He wishes to be free of its perceived constraints.

The poet's attitude towards the sun is that of a derisive, virile youth towards an older man enfeebled in mind and body by age. Donne addresses him as 'busy old fool.' Introducing the theme of Time, he refers to the time-measuring qualities of the sun, asking him why his appearance must mark the end of a joyful and passionate night with his sweetheart. The use of the word 'busy' may be reminiscent to modern readers of the nosiness and gossip of a busybody and Donne is clearly irritated by the sun's attention - this gives the poem a hurried and vexed tone.

Moving on to his theme of Love, the poet wants to know why the behaviour of two young lovers must be dictated by calendars and time. Two more insults follow, as Donne calls the sun 'saucy' and 'pedantic' as if the sun was deriving fun from deliberately antagonizing him by putting an end to the fun with his girlfriend.

So John Donne bids the sun run a whole list of alternative, more deserving, errands - including waking scholars late for school or the king's huntsmen, asserting that love has no set season or schedule and (famously) that 'hours, days, months are the rags of time.'

Referring to the theme of Light and Dark, Donne pours scorn on the strength of the sun and the brightness of its rays, vowing that he would sooner eclipse them with ease (just by shutting his eyes) than lose sight of his dearly beloved for even so much as a 'wink' of time. With this use of cheeky language he echoes the tone of amorous playfulness evoked by the word 'saucy.'

To the idea of sauciness is then added the spiciness of images from the exotic Indies. Donne challenges the sun to say whether their charms equal those of the girl he loves. However a slight note of caution enters here as Donne, in attesting to her charms as being worthy of kings, admits that those charms may be being shared with others 'all here in one bed lay.'

Although Donne equates himself with the princes with whom the sun is acquainted, in terms of the riches he has in his own princess, he seems to be aware of her generosity to other 'princes.' She has been quite free with her favors, it seems. He seems philosophical about this however.

As the sun might as well give up according to Donne, it might as well retire and become a senior, saving itself all the trouble and effort. It would be free of its commitments, as Donne wishes he could be. Returning to his theme of Age, Donne suggests that its only retirement task need be to keep the happy couple sunlit and warm in their own little world.

At the end of the poem, Donne returns again to one of his key themes - astrology. In Donne's time this was considered as much of a science as 'astronomy' - indeed the two were interlinked. 'This bed thy center is, these walls thy sphere' reflect the controversial belief that the earth was the centre of the universe and that other heavenly bodies orbited around it. In their bliss, the sweethearts are oblivious and everything like planets or walls, revolves around them. Admiration of the sun around this time

was a risky business for Christians as it conflicted with belief in God's power and verged on worship.

Neatly and wittily, John Donne rounds off a poem devoted to the themes of Time, Space, Measurement, Astrology, Astronomy, Age, Youth -and Love. He was later said to have retracted many of these amorous poems of youth, but there is many an essay that attests that they represent some of Donne's best, brightest and freshest work.