“The Sunne Rising”-substance and Interpretation

Before I go to paraphrase upon the poems of Donne prescribed for you, I would advise you to remember the following points regarding Donne’s poetry:

1.Donne takes both love and religion seriously.

2.His expressions are witty as they express his ideas through paradox. (A paradox is a statement that seems to be absurd or contradictory, but is, or may be, true).

3.Many times, Donne skillfully or ingeniously conjures up a scholarly image thus lending upon the poem a singular beauty. So, we have to do a great deal of intellectual exercise before we can be affected by the poet’s emotion.

4.In reading Donne’s poems, we are expected to make some “emotional apprehension of thought” (in order to appreciate the sublimity of the poet’s imagery).

5.The poems by Donne are generally about how true love may lead one to a knowledge about its role in uplifting the soul from physical mortality to metaphysical immortality.

6. Metaphysical conceit is an important element in Donne’s metaphysical poetry. It also lends upon a poem a dramatic element. (A **conceit** is a kind of metaphor that compares two very unlike things in a surprising and clever way. Often, conceits are extended metaphors that dominate an entire passage or poem. Metaphysical poet John Donne was known for his conceits (often called metaphysical conceits).

THE SUNNE RISING

The poet and his beloved are disturbed in their joyful closeness in the bed by the beams of the morning sun. The poet calls the sun an old fool for it just goes on ritualistically doing its work every day. According to him the sun is also ill-mannered because it sends its rays to fall upon the lovers while they are making love. The sun should know that the lovers cannot be bound by the movements of the sun unlike the other things of the earth. The poet says that instead of disturbing them, the sun should go to do some other things, like, rebuking the school-children for being late in going to school; or it may also rebuke the apprentices of the various crafts who neglect their duty; or it may also go and remind the huntsmen about the king’s preparation to go for hunting; or it may call the farmers to remind them about the time for harvest. Time is draped in tattered clothes like a beggar, while the lovers are in quest for eternity in love.

The sun should not take pride of its being all powerful. The poet can obscure its beams by just closing his eyes. However, he would not do so, for if he does so, he will miss the sight of his beloved. According to the poet, his beloved’s eyes are more powerful than the sun. If the eyes of the sun do not get blinded by the dazzle of his beloved’s eyes, it may come again next day to inform him which respective regions of the world are famous for gold, spices and in different other resources. The poet means that his beloved has fragrance more powerful than any region (of the world) can have it produced in its spices and her beloved’s beauty is more striking than the gold produced by any region of the world. The poet asks the sun to visit all the kingdoms of the world and to find for itself that his bed room is indeed more resourceful than all the resources together belonging to all the kingdoms. (The poet shows that: the sun after shining over the East Indies, the West Indies and other kingdoms of the world finally would come to see how all the world has been contracted within the four walls of his room; -this is a beautiful poetical conceit).

Next again he uses another metaphysical conceit by showing that his love is centripetal (that is coming towards the centre). The poet claims that his beloved represents the riches of all the states of the world and he as lover represents all the princes of the world. Beyond the poet and his beloved there are no kings and no states. The princes are only the mock-princes, they possess nothing valuable as the poet’s beloved. Similarly, all honour is a mockery comparing to the honour of his love and all the gold of the world are also like things of basal matters transformed into gold by alchemy. The poet is the only true king of the world and his beloved is as respectable as the most pure gold compared to all the gold of the world. The poet says that the sun cannot be entirely happy because it can shine only half of the globe at a time. Comparing to this, the world of love of the poet and his beloved live entirely upon the light of love. The poet humorously (or rather sarcastically) says that the sun has grown old by labouring constantly every day. So, like an old man, he should now take rest. And if it wants to take rest, then it should forget lighting upon the rest of the world but the closet in which he is in his joyful closeness with his beloved in the bed. The poet says that the sun should shine in the poet’s bed room and in doing so the old sun can enjoy some rest in his old age. It will be like shining upon all the world, since the poet and his beloved are all the world.

In regards to the underlying conceit here (in the last stanza), the poet brings out the dissimilarity between the vastness of the external world and the smallness of his room. He and his beloved are the world in microcosm, and their bed is the centre of the world.

In the poem, Donne’s attitude towards the sun in unconventional. In the first stanza the poet says that love knows no season and no time, and is also not concerned about hours, days and months which are only fractions of time. In the second stanza the poet challenges the sun by asking him why he should consider himself to be so strong. The third stanza presents an artistic summing up. He commands the sun to shine for the poet and his beloved since the bed should be the centre for the sun and the walls of the bed-chamber should make up the sphere of the orbit for it.

Thus the poem presents to us an adequate impression about the mood of the lover. The poem is delightfully witty and informal. The language of the poem is dramatic, and the poet seems to carry on a powerful discourse with the sun, chiding, rebuking and advising the object of Nature. The variety of images adds grace to the poem. The household images (‘windows’, ‘curtains’), natural images(‘sun’), geographical images(both th’ Indias) seem to have been yoked together by a certain violence that is typically metaphysical. The tone of the poem is humorous and the language is colloquial and simple.

In his “A Glossary of Literary Terms” M.H.Abrams says about Donne’s style : “….whether writing the poetry of love or of intense religious experience, he was persistently “witty”, making ingenious use of paradox, pun, and startling parallels and distinctions.” Abrams also mentions in the same breath about Donne’s shock tactics, the dramatic form of direct address, the rough idiom, and the rhythms of the living voice in his poems.