

Department of English
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B.A. English Hons Part I
History of English Literature

Shakespeare as a dramatist

In my previous topic I have discussed the role of the 'University wits' in the development of drama and they paved the way for Shakespeare as their successor and the drama reached its height.

William Shakespeare was born on 23rd April 1564, at Stratford-on-Avon. His father was a tradesman. Like other boys he went to local Grammar School, an excellent institution where he was taught Latin and arithmetic his few years in school gave him a sound education. Financial misfortune happened and he was taken from school to help his family by earning money. It is said that meanwhile he fell into bad company and in a deer stealing case he had to fly from home. There may not be truth in this story. It is certain that after a few years of his marriage he left his native land to seek job. In this period drama was gaining popularity in the hands of 'The University wits' Shakespeare joined the stage and became first an actor and then a playwright. He stayed in London more than twenty years working hard and producing dramas.

His works:— Shakespeare's non dramatic poetry consists of two narrative poems Venus and Adonis and Lucrece in both of them Classicism of the age is very significant. A sequence of 154 sonnets, the first 126 is addressed to a man, and the remaining is addressed to a lady. Shakespeare's dramatic works comprises 37 plays. His activity as a writer for the stage extended over some 24 years. Shakespeare critics have agreed to subdivide these ~~four~~ periods 24 years into four periods, and through this division we are able to follow the evolution of his genius and art and remarkable changes in his thought and style.

① Early period:— Shakespeare's apprenticeship begins with the revision of old plays, such as the three parts of Henry VI. To this period belongs his first comedies and in which the influence of Lily is seen. In this period his plays consists Love's Labour's Lost, The Two Gentleman of Verona, The comedy of Errors.

II 1594-1600 Period of great comedies and Chronicle plays. The work of this period are Richard II, King John, The Merchant of Venice, Henry IV Part I and II Henry V, The Taming of the Shrew, Much Ado About Nothing, As you like It and Twelfth Night. Shakespeare now leaves behind him the influence of his early masters, his works become independent.

III 1601-08 Period of the great tragedies. In this period all Shakespeare's power his dramatic power, his intellectual power and his power of expression are at their heighest. This is the time of his supreme masterpieces. The plays of this period are: Julius Caesar, Hamlet, All is well that Ends well, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra.

IV 1608-12 Period of the later comedies. Again we note a sudden and singular change in the temper of Shakespeare work. In these last plays the groundwork is still furnished by tragic passion, but the evil is no longer permitted to have its way. but is controlled and conquered by the good. A very tender and gracious tone prevails in them throughout. Plays belonging to this period are The Tempest and The winter's Tale.

Critical Appreciation of John Donne's sonnet "The Sun Rising."

(B.A. English Hons.Part-1.Paper-1)

John Donne is the most influential metaphysical poet. His poetry is full of wit, purely intellectual and it makes an appeal to the intellectuals. His selection of subject matter, his treatment, his diction and style prove him true and great metaphysical poet.

"The Sun Rising" is a metaphysical love poem, it is loaded with wit, conceits and unbeatable logics of John Donne. The Sun Rising reveals the setting, status and mood of poet. The poet was making love with his beloved in bedroom but sunrays have disturbed him while peeping through the window. 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.

"The Sun 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 peeping through the curtains of the window of their bedroom, signalling the morning and the end of their time together. 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!" (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 centre of the universe, with the Sun rotating around the Earth: "This bed thy centre 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 centre 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.

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