

The good morrow a metaphysical explication



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The Good Morrow: A Metaphysical Explication Posted by: Rasputin in Your opinion is important to us, please comment on this article. by Michael Hall

Few come close to such a thorough expression of love as John Donne. In his poem, "The Good Morrow," Donne fully employs the numerous devices of poetry to relay his speaker's endearing message to his lover. He uses elements of structure, figurative language, point-of-view, and tone to creatively support his speaker in the endeavor.

However, not all aspects of the poem are clear due to the astute allusions and references by the learned Donne. Examples of these unclear elements are found in the first stanza's "seven sleepers den" phrase, the second stanza's exploration imagery, and the final stanza's hemispherical imagery. On the surface, these references may seem to be carelessly included and non-supportive of the central theme. But we will come to see that these references do much to further support the speaker's message. We will come to discover that Donne's "The Good Morrow" is a poem that efficiently uses devices to maximize the poetic potential of the verse, and contains erudite allusions and references that further support the speaker's message to his beloved. "The Good Morrow" is interestingly structured to aid the speaker in his message. The poem is divided into three stanzas, each of which includes seven lines.

In addition, each of these stanzas is further divided into a quatrain and a triplet. In the book, *John Donne and the Metaphysical Gesture*, Judah Stampfer notes that each iambic pentameter quatrain is rounded out, not with a couplet, but a triplet with an Alexandrine close a, b, a, b, c, c, c.

(142). This division is not solely reflected in the rhyme scheme, but also in the verse.

For example, the quatrain is used to reveal the speaker's state of mind, while the triplet allows the speaker to reflect on that mindset (Stampfer 142). In addition, the first stanza strategically uses assonance to reinforce the word "we." This is done by a repetition of the long e sound.

For example, all of these words are from the first stanza: we, weaned, countrey, childlishly, sleepers, fancies, bee, any, beauty, see, desired, dreame, thee. As you can see, this is not merely coincidence, but an ingenious strategy to further emphasize the union of the two lovers.

However, Donne uses assonance for the opposite effect in the last stanza.

Instead of focusing on the couple, the speaker focuses on himself by reinforcing the word "I." This is done by a repetition of the long i sound. For example, all of these words can be found in the third stanza: I, thine, mine, finde, declining, dyes, alike, die.

True, there are instances of the long e sound in the third stanza, but the long i sound predominates. Due to this, there is an obvious opposition to what the speaker says, and to what the musicality of the poem suggests. From a musical perspective, instead of being primarily focused on the union, the speaker appears to be more concerned with himself. However, this view will change as we further discuss the poem. Donne's use of figurative language, along with the point-of-view and tone of the speaker, enhance his poem.

First of all, sexual imagery is present in the first stanza. For example, words such as "weaned" and "sucked" elicit breast images. These loaded terms also help identify "country pleasures" as a metaphor for breasts. Another example of metaphor is the word "beauty" in line 6, which actually represents the woman. Metaphysical conceits are also present in the poem. An example is the hemispherical imagery representing the lovers in the final stanza. In the second stanza, there is an example of hyperbole when the speaker says "makes one little roome, an every where".

"This is an obvious exaggeration and a physical impossibility. There is also use of paradox in the poem. For example, when the speaker says: "true plaine hearts doe in the faces rest." Obviously, this phrase is paradoxical as hearts cannot rest in faces.

An example of metonymy can be found in the last stanza when the speaker states: "My face in thine eye, thine in mine appeares." The speaker does not mean that his face literally appears in his lover's eye, but that she is aware of him. There are also two allusions in the poem, one with the "seven sleepers den," the other with the "hemispheres," both of which are explained in greater detail later in the paper. Furthermore, there is a superb example of symbolism in the poem. This can be found once in the poem itself, and in the title "good morrow." This not only represents the physical sunrise, but also symbolizes the birth of the awakened individual. In addition, the point-of-view of the speaker is from the first-person perspective.

Although there are two individuals involved in the poem, only the male speaker is heard. And finally, the tone is casually intimate. Clues to the informal atmosphere of the poem can be found by glancing at the coarse language used by the speaker, such as: "I suck'd, she snorted," and "I got."

Despite the coarseness, the speaker is clearly infatuated with the women being addressed. Platos Cave Fig. 1.

Plato's Cave Allegory. (Allegory) The phrase "seven sleepers" introduced in the first stanza could be interpreted in more than one way. The most direct event this phrase might be alluding to is a Christian and Mohammedan legend of the seven youths of Ephesus who hid in a cave for 187 years so as to avoid pagan persecution during the dawn of Christianity (Bloom). Amazingly, these youths did not die, but slept for the entire period ("Good"). So the speaker could be comparing the period prior to the realization of their love to the "seven sleepers" in that they both "snorted", or slept (OED), in what appeared to be a seemingly infinite amount of time. But except for line 4, there are no other references that take the analogy further.

There is, however, another possibility. In his article, "Plato in John Donne's 'The Good Morrow'," Christopher Nassaar proposes that this reference may be more accurately alluding to Plato's Cave Allegory (20-21; Fig. 1). In Book VII of *The Republic*, Plato, through Socrates, describes a world in which mankind has been imprisoned in a cave since birth. These prisoners are chained at the legs and neck, and can only

see the shadows on the wall caused by themselves and other objects that block the firelight (Plato ??? Book??™). So everything the prisoners believe to be real is in fact an illusion. They are mistaking ??? shadows of shadows for reality??™ (Nassaar 20). The analogy continues with a prisoner being released and ascending from the cave into the outside world, where he eventually comes to discover God, the true reality of the world, and the illusionary nature of the cave (Plato ??? Book??™).

Donne??™'s speaker is then comparing his life before love with the confinement of Plato??™'s prisoners. Basically, when compared against their present love, ??? all past pleasures have been merely ??? fancies,??™ and the women he ??? desir??™d, and got??™ were only a ??? dream??™ of this one woman??™ (??? Good??™). Then when he finally ascends from the cave, he discovers the superior reality of his beloved, and desires not to return to the lust-ridden cave of his past. The purpose of the exploration imagery in the second stanza is to further reveal the speaker??™'s preference of his new relationship over worldly desires. In the triplet of the second stanza, the speaker states: Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone, Let Maps to other, worlds on worlds have showne, Let us possesse one world, each hath one, and is one. This apparent digression actually further supports the Platonic association of the first stanza. First of all, we must remember that the earthly pursuits of Elizabethan England were much different than from the present.

One of the primary public interests was the ongoing exploration of the world. Although this had been going on for some time, it was in the ??? Elizabethan-Jacobean era??™ that exploration ??? saw its really great florescence??™

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(Rugoff 137). And ??? with the Thames the most popular of local thoroughfares and with sailors scattered throughout the city, the average Londoner of Elizabeth??™s day could hardly help knowing something of ships and sea travel??™ (Rugoff 129). However, many people from this era knew of the Americas, but few had ever been there. Any knowledge they did have was second-hand and intangible, which left Elizabethans with a distorted perception of the New World. Therefore, these ??? new worlds??™ represent a sort of dream, and the desire to pursue these dreams is directly related to the illusions of the cave. The speaker views this popular pastime as a tool to placate slaves, and not an activity for an enlightened individual, such as himself.

There is no need for him to search for ??? new worlds??™ since he has already found it in the union of him and his beloved. ??? In possessing one another, each has gained world enough??™ (Bloom). The hemispherical imagery in the third stanza could be interpreted as both spatially acute, and related to a farcical Platonic view on the origin of humanity. Donne ??? collapses his geographical metaphor into the tiny reflection of each lover??™s face in the other??™s eye??™ (Holland 63). So while maintaining the expansive, world-filling, declaration of his love in the second stanza, the speaker states that this world of love is contained within their eyes. However, this view proves more difficult to support upon viewing the following lines. This is because Donne??™s speaker metaphorically describes the pair as two separate ??? hemispheares??™ Now it is possible that these two ??? hemispheares??™ could represent the eyes.

However, since the speaker is talking about the couple, it would have been more accurate to mention four, not two. Also, the cardinal point imagery is not clear when using this interpretation. On the other hand, the hemispherical imagery also alludes to an odd speech by Aristophanes in Plato's Symposium (Holland 64). In his speech, Aristophanes relates an amusing legend of humanity's origin.

Basically, Aristophanes stated that at the beginning of time, human beings took the form of a sphere. Each individual had four legs, four arms, and a single head with a face on either side. The story goes that as a penalty for angering the gods, Zeus divided each human being into two separate beings. But although they were distinct individuals, they were still spiritual halves endlessly seeking to reunite as a whole. This natural instinct to reunite the halves is Aristophanes' explanation of love (Plato Symposium 18-23). So Donne's speaker believes he has found his other half in his beloved, and together they form the original whole. Furthermore, the cardinal point imagery is cleared up with this interpretation.

For example, the speaker states: "Where can we finde two better hemispheares/ Without sharpe North, without declining West?" The speaker is saying that in their new united spherical world, North and West are absent. The relationship will not be frigid, or sharpe, nor will it wane, or be declining. Instead, their relationship will be one of warmth and everlasting love. So now that we have discussed the various elements included in the poem, what exactly does it mean? The Good Morrow is a chronological and spatial poem through which the speaker reveals his growing maturity and awareness of his love as a response to his

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awakening, and reinforces this union in the musicality of the poem. The poem is chronological in that it progresses from a symbolic infant stage in the first stanza, to the morning of the present in the second, and finally in the last stanza, to an immortal outlook of their relationship in the future. The poem is spatial in that love is initially represented as being confined to "one little roome," or a cave, to expanding to fill an entire world, then contracting all this love into a powerful force that is contained in the eyes of the pair.

The poem can also be viewed as a maturing of the speaker in that he progressed from a life of physical lust, to love, and finally longing to be eternally fused with his beloved. Also, the speaker becomes increasingly aware of his love for the woman. In the beginning, he was engrossed in other women, but he came to realize that these women were just reflections of what he was truly chasing, the one real woman. In addition, the poem is centered on a theme of awakening. The poem begins with the speaker having been figuratively asleep in a cave, as in Plato's analogy. But his woman finally releases him and he emerges into the sunlight, "the good morrow," a new man growing increasingly aware of his love.

Furthermore, the speaker reinforces this union through the musicality of the verse. The focus actually begins on the couple with sounds that reinforce "we," but ends with sound that reinforces "I." This represents the union of the two halves into the one "I."

Overall, we have seen how Donne used poetic devices and learned references to support the speaker. First, we analyzed the unique structure

and musical elements within the poem. Then we examined how Donne used figurative language, point-of-view, and tone to create a more believable speaker. Next, we took a closer look at ??? seaven sleepers den??™ phrase, and saw how it has roots in both Christian mythology and Platonic allegory. After that, we gained a better understanding of Donne??™s use of exploration imagery in the second stanza. Then we investigated the farcical Platonic basis for the hemispherical imagery in the third stanza. And finally, we examined the poem from a holistic perspective and recognized how all of these various elements contributed to the overall message. So we have come to discover that Donne??™s ??? The Good Morrow??™ is poem that efficiently uses devices to maximize the poetic potential of the verse, and contains erudite allusions and references that further support the speaker??™s message to his beloved.

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