

Poetry Section

A Lecture upon the Shadow

-John Donne

Stand still, and I will read to thee
A lecture, love, in love's philosophy.
These three hours that we have spent,
Walking here, two shadows went
Along with us, which we ourselves produc'd.
But, now the sun is just above our head,
We do those shadows tread,
And to brave clearness all things are reduc'd.
So whilst our infant loves did grow,
Disguises did, and shadows, flow
From us, and our cares; but now 'tis not so.
That love has not attain'd the high'st degree,
Which is still diligent lest others see.

Except our loves at this noon stay,
Except our loves at this noon stay,
We shall new shadows make the other way.
As the first were made to blind
Others, these which come behind
Will work upon ourselves, and blind our eyes.
If our loves faint, and westwardly decline,
To me thou, falsely, thine,
And I to thee mine actions shall disguise.
The morning shadows wear away,
But these grow longer all the day;
But oh, love's day is short, if love decay.
Love is a growing, or full constant light,
And his first minute, after noon, is night.

About the Poet:

John Donne was born on Jan 22, 1572 in London, England. He is known as the founder of the Metaphysical School of poetry, a term used for Donne's poetry by Dr. Samuel Johnson. He was brought up as a Roman Catholic, later converted to Anglicanism, and was Dean of St. Paul's Church till his death. John Donne wrote love lyrics, verses and a series of holy sonnets and some sacred poems. His famous major volumes are 'Satires' and 'Songs and Sonnets'.

About the Poem:

This is a poem about love which metaphorically deals with vision. His poem compares the vision and the delusions of lovers to a situation of light and shadow where insight is unhindered at noon only, when the light of the sun produces no shadow. It denotes that the love of the beloved should not decrease/fade with the passage of time.

Like many of Donne's poems, this poem too reflects an emphasis on the intellect and wit as against feeling and emotion, which is one of the traits of metaphysical poetry.

Glossary:

tread : to step or walk on to put a foot or feet on

disguises: changes appearance (clothes etc.)

attain'd : got

diligent : hard working

decline : reduce

decay : gradually deteriorate by natural process.

1- Choose the correct alternative:-

(a) " Stand still and I will read to thee"

Whom does "I" refer to?

(i) The poet himself

(ii) Lover/beloved

(iii) God

(iv) None of these

(b) "So whilst our infant loves did grow"

What does "infant love" mean here?

(i) Baby's love

(ii) Love at its initial stage

(iii) Love in its maturity

(iv) Mutual love

2- Answer the following questions in 15-20 words each:-

(a) What does shadows mean in this poem?

(b) "We do those shadows tread," What does this line symbolize?

(c) What do you understand by "Disguise"?

(d) How will the shadows blind the eyes?

(e) "The morning shadows wear away", What does morning shadows refer to?

3- Answer the following questions in 30-40 words each:

(a) How do the shadows before noon differ from the shadows of afternoon?

(b) Love is described as light. What makes the poet talk about shadows?

(c) According to the poet what is the nature of true love?

(d) What do you understand by "Westwardly decline"?

4- Answer the following questions in 150 words each:

(a) What is the central idea of the poem? Explain

(b) Critically appreciate the poem.