

*Lo, in the Orient when the gracious light
Lifts up his burning head, each under eye
Doth homage to his new appearing sight,
Serving with looks his sacred majesty,
And having climbed the steep up heavenly hill,
Resembling strong youth in his middle age,
Yet mortal looks adore his beauty still,
Attending on his golden pilgrimage:
But when from high-most pitch with weary car,
Like feeble age he reeleth from the day,
The eyes (fore dutious) now converted are
From his low tract and look another way.
So thou, thyself out-going in thy noon,
Unlooked on diest unless thou get a son.*

Patterns begin to emerge after the main threads have been laid down in the first half dozen sonnets. Though the subject of the speaker remains the same, new combinations of threads create striking effects. In the first quatrain of Sonnet 7 the eye and court motifs are picked up again in a sunrise scene where ordinary earth dwellers pay homage to the gracious majesty of the rising sun. As elsewhere in the sonnets, looks and gazes are significant. The cynosure—the person or object that attracts and rivets the eyes of the world—typically the courtiers or society in general—is the most powerful force, both political and sexual. Here the cynosure is a double figure, first the sun at mid day and then the youth whom he resembles (l. 6). The mortal gazers adore the sun’s beauty even though he is middle aged. His pilgrimage is “golden,” and his “courtiers” form a retinue to attend him.

However, a dramatic shift comes, as it frequently does, at the end of the octave. As quickly as winter came in Sonnet 5, the sun tumbles from the zenith in his weary chariot (“car,” l. 9). Already he appears to be old aged, feeble and reeling. The reaction from his followers comes just as fast: their eyes, which had been lowered respectfully, now turn away. The same thing will happen, the speaker implies, to the beautiful young man when he ceases to be the cynosure.

The connection between the sun and the youth comes out clearly in the couplet. The youth going out, even dying (“outgoing,” l. 13), in his prime, will not be gazed at by the many unless he begets a son. That son, we are to assume, will be just as beautiful and fit to worship as the sun.