

2ed Stage Third Lecture

As virtuous men pass mildly away,
And whisper to their souls to go,
Whilst some of their sad friends do say
The breath goes now, and some say, No:

So let us melt, and make no noise,
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;
'Twere profanation of our joys
To tell the laity our love.

Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears,
Men reckon what it did, and meant;
But trepidation of the spheres,
Though greater far, is innocent.

Dull sublunary lovers' love
(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit
Absence, because it doth remove
Those things which elemented it.

But we by a love so much refined,
That our selves know not what it is,
Inter-assured of the mind,
Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

Our two souls therefore, which are one,
Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to airy thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the other do.

And though it in the center sit,
Yet when the other far doth roam,

It leans and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
Like th' other foot, obliquely run;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end where I begun.

Images and Conceits

One of the most important and recognizable images associated with '*A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*' is that of a compass. It appears towards the end of the text, in line 26. It is important because it symbolizes the strength of their relationship, but also the balance that exists between the speaker and his wife.

Donne describes the compass as being "stiff" with a "fixed foot," this is his wife's part of the metaphor. She remains stationary while her husband, the speaker, "roam[s]" around. It is due to her steadfastness that he always finds his way back home. The speaker clearly sees this conceit, or comparison between two very unlike things, as a romantic. One should take note of the fact that the speaker's loyalty to his wife seems to hinge on her placidity. If she were to "roam" the entire balance would be thrown off.

Another image that is important to the text appears throughout the first half of the poem, that of natural, disastrous weather patterns. The first time one of these disasters is made clear is in the fifth line with the mention of a "flood" and a "tempest," or powerful storm. In this instance the weather is being used to show the exaggerated emotions of lesser love. The couple he is imagining cries and sighs outrageously as if hoping someone will take note of their passion.

In the first stanza of this piece the speaker begins with an image of death. He is speaking on the death of a man who is "virtuous." Due to

his good nature his death comes peacefully. Donne compares dying in this instance to “whisper[ing]” one’s soul away. There is nothing traumatic about it. “Whisper” is a perfect example of onomatopoeia. The word sounds or resembles the noise it represents.

The dying man is not alone. There are “sad friends” around his bed who are unable to decide whether or not the man is dead. His final moments are so peaceful that there is no sign to tell the onlookers the end has come. They speak to one another asking if “The breath goes now” or not.

The second stanza might come as something of a surprise to readers unused to Donne’s complicated use of conceit. Rather than explaining what the first stanza was all about, it adds on additional information. The speaker is comparing the peaceful death of a virtuous man to the love he shares with the intended listener. When they separate they do so without the “tear-floods” and “sigh-tempests” of the shallow. Donne’s speaker sees the way other partners are around one another and knows his relationship is better. He and his partner would never be so crass as to expose their emotions to the “laity” or common people. It is something they keep to themselves. He states that it would be a “profanation,” or disgrace to their “joy” to expose it. They will “make no noise” and remain on the high ground above those involved in lesser loves.

The third stanza introduces another image of natural disaster, the “Moving of th’ earth” or an earthquake. It is something unexpected and unexplained. Earthquakes also bring along “harms and fears.” These lines have been added to emphasize the absurdity of making a big deal over the speaker’s departure.

The next two lines are a bit more obscure. They refer to the celestial spheres, or concentric circles, in which the moon, stars and planets

moved. Although they are sectioned off, they still shake and vibrate in reaction to other events. Here the speaker is describing their “trepidation,” or shaking. It is a greater shaking than that which an earthquake is able to inflict but it is unseen, innocent. This is another metaphor for how the speaker sees his relationship. It is not the showy earthquake but the much more powerful shaking of the celestial spheres.

The speaker returns to describing the lesser love of others in the fifth stanza. It is “Dull” and it is “sublunary,” meaning it exists under the moon rather than in the sky. Those who participate in these relationships are driven by their senses. The “soul” of the relationship is based on what one’s senses can determine. Physical presence is of the utmost importance to these loves. They “cannot admit / Absence” because it “doth remove” the entire relationship. Everything shallow lovers have with one another is based on touch and sight.