

2ed Stage

Fourth 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.

The fifth stanza provides a contrast to the fourth. He returns to his own relationship and speaks of himself and his wife as “we.” They have a “refined” or well-tuned and highbrow relationship. Their love is so beyond the physical world that they, physical beings, have trouble understanding it. They “know not what it is.”

The next two lines reiterate the fact that the love the speaker and his wife have is spiritual. It is more mental than it is physical. This means they are “Inter-assured of the mind” and do not care for the “eyes, lips, and hands.” When they part these are not the elements they will miss about one another.

The sixth stanza begins with a fairly straightforward and recognizable declaration about marriage. They might have two separate souls but now they act as “one.” It is due to this fact that when they part, they will not “endure” a “breach, but an expansion.” Their love will stretch as gold does when it is beaten thin. It is the same, even when pushed to the limit.

It is also important to take note of the fact that Donne chose to use gold as a representative of their love. He recognizes the elements of his relationship in its durability and beauty.

It is at this point in the piece that the image of the compass, as discussed in the introduction, becomes important. First, Donne goes

back on his previous statement about their “oneness.” He knows there might be some doubt of their “inter-assured” relationship so he makes this concession. “If they,” meaning himself and his wife, are “two” then they are the two legs of a compass.

Donne speaks of his wife as being the “fixed foot” of the device. She has the steady “soul” that remains grounded and never makes a “show / To move.” His wife only moves if “the other do,” meaning himself.

In the eighth stanza the movement of the fixed foot is further described. Initially it is in the centre of their world, everything revolves around it. Then, if the other leg, the one compared to Donne, decides to “roam” far into the distance, it leans. This is the only movement that his wife makes. When he needs her to she “hearkens” after him then straightens up again, or “grows erect” when he comes home or returns to the fixed point.

The final four lines describe the metaphor in full, just in case any part of the compass analogy was in doubt. The speaker is very much addressing his lines to his wife. He tells her that she will be to him the line that brings him back in. She has a “firmness” that makes his “circle just,” or keeps it within a limited area. No matter what he does or where he roams, she will always get him back to where he began.

Qs. How do you evaluate this poem as a true embodiment of metaphysical poetry?

Q. What are the major images of conceit?

Q. How do you indicate wit and wisdom in the poem as metaphysical features?