

John Donne

A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning

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.

Stefanie Wortman 1/22/2016 8:37 AM

Comment [1]: Donne suggests that the love he writes of in this poem is sacred when he says that describing it to "the laity," or the common people, as opposed to the clergymen in a church, would be a "profanation."

Stefanie Wortman 1/22/2016 8:38 AM

Comment [2]: This speaker claims that while lesser ("sublunary") loves are based on the senses, his soulful love is "so much refined" that not being able to see and touch "eyes, lips, and hands" makes little difference.

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.

(*From Songs and Sonnets*, 1633 by, John Donne)

Stefanie Wortman 1/22/2016 8:39 AM

Comment [3]: Donne ends the poem with a conceit—an extended figure of speech that draws an elaborate connection between two unlike things. In this case, he uses the kind of compass you would use to draw a circle to describe the relationship between the two lovers who are parting. The leg of the compass that inscribes the circle can travel far from the one that holds the center point, but they remain connected and work together to make a “just” or perfect shape.