
Main Text

A Valediction: forbidding Mourning

As virtuous men passe mildly'away,
And whisper to their soules, to goe,
Whilst some of their sad friends doe say,
The breath goes now, and some say, no:

pg 63

5 So let us melt, and make no noise,
No teare-floods, nor sigh-tempests move,
'Twere prophanation of our joyes
To tell the layetie our love.

Moving of th'earth brings harmes and feares,
10 Men reckon what it did and meant,
But trepidation of the spheraes,
Though greater farre, is innocent.

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

But we by'a love, so much refin'd,
That our selves know not what it is,
Inter-assured of the mind,
20 Care lesse, eyes, lips, and hands to misse.

Our two soules therefore, which are one,
Though I must goe, endure not yet
breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to avery thinnesse beate.

25 If they be two, they are two so
As stiffe twin compasses are two,
Thy soule the fixt foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the'other doe.

And though it in the center sit,
30 Yet when the other far doth rome,
It leans, and hearkens after it,
And growes erect, as it comes home.

pg 64

Such wilt thou be to mee, who must
Like th'other foot, obliquely runne;
35 Thy firmnes makes my circle just,
And makes me end, where I begunne.

Title. I follow Grierson in punctuating the titles of all four Valedictions in the same way, with a colon separating the general and the specific title.

A Valediction: forbidding Mourning. HK 2 omits. Title from 1633: omit A TC:... against Mourning A 25: A Valediction H 40, C 57, H 49, B: Upon the parting from his Mistress Doh, OF, S 96, S: To his Love upon his departure from her JC.

1 mildly'away] mildly away 1633

3 Whilst] And H 40, C 57, H 49, L 74, TC, P, A 25, B, S; see note

l. 3. *Whilst*. The weight of manuscript authority is on the side of 'And', but it could so easily have been caught from the line above that I retain the reading of 1633 and Group III.

4. no:] no. 1633

7 'Twere] 'were 1633

8 our] of our L. 74, TC, QF, S. 96, Cy, P, B, JC

l. 8. *To tell the layette our love*. In spite of the hiatus, unusual in Donne, I prefer the reading of 1633, H. 40, Group I, to 'of our love' (L. 74, II). The witness of Group III is divided. The reading of Group II gives a smoother line but at the expense of adding an unnecessary preposition which takes metrical stress.

9 Moving ... brings] Movings ... bringe A. 25; Movings cause Dob, QF, S. 96; moving ... cause JC

ll. 9–12. Earthquakes cause damage and inspire fear; men calculate what harm they have done and what they portend. The 'trepidation' (or libration) of the ninth, the crystalline sphere, which communicates its movement to all the spheres beneath it, is imperceptible and harmless. The crystalline sphere was postulated to account for the phenomenon of the precession of the equinoxes.

The contrast between the corruptible regions below the moon, in which such phenomena as earthquakes (classed by the Elizabethans as meteors) occur, and the incorruptible heavens above her sphere leads to the contrast between 'Dull sublunary lovers love' and 'refin'd' love.

l. 13. *sublunary*. The stress is on the first syllable.

l. 14. *Whose soule is sense*: whose animating principle is sensual desire.

l. 16. *elemented*: composed.

17 by'a] by a 1633

l. 18. *That our soules know not what it is*. Cf. 'Negative Love'.

l. 19. *Inter-assured*. Donne's fondness for the prefix 'inter', denoting reciprocal action, is strikingly apparent in Q.F.D.

20 lips, and] MSS.: lips 1633

21 therefore ... are] then ... are but Dob, QF, S. 96; therefore ... are but S

22 goe] part Dob, QF, S. 96, S

24 Like] As Dob, QF, S. 96, A. 25, JC, S

ll. 25–36. *If they be two*, &c. A pair of compasses was a well-known emblem, familiar from the device of the firm of Plantin which displays a hand emerging from a cloud and holding a pair of compasses, with the motto '*Labore et Constantia*' Professor Praz (*Secentismo e Marinismo*, Florence, 1925, p. 109) pointed out a use of the image in a madrigal by Guarini (no. xcvi), and Professor Wilson (*Elizabethan and Jacobean*, 1945, pp. 30 and 133) quoted a use of the image very like Donne's from Hall's *Epistles, The Second Volume*, 1608, Decade I, Epistle 1, p. 6:

An heart truly faithful cannot but have an hand Christianly bountiful: Charity and Faith make up one perfect pair of compasses, that can take the true latitude of a Christian heart: Faith is the one foot, pitch't in the centre unmovable, whiles Charity walks about, in a perfect circle of beneficence: these two never did, never can go asunder. Guarini's madrigal 'Risposta dell'amante' is a reply by a lover departing for foreign countries to his mistress's fears that he might forsake her, expressed in the preceding madrigal:

Con voi sempre son io
Agitato, ma fermo,
E se'l meno v'involo, il più vi lasso;
Son simile al compasso,
Ch'un piede in voi, quasi mio centro, i'fermo,
L'altro patisce di fortuna i giri,
Ma non può far, che'n torno a voi non giri.

It seems highly probable that Donne developed the image from Guarini. He employed it again in the 'Obsequies to the Lord Harington' (ll. 105–10) and more than once in his Sermons; see Josef Lederer, 'John Donne and the Emblematic Practice', R.E.S., xxii, July 1946.

28 but] yet Dob, QF, S. 96, JC

30 when] whilst Dob, QF, S. 96, S; while JC

32 it H. 40, L. 74, TC, Cy, P, B; yt C. 57, H. 49, Dob (b.c.): that 1633, QF, S. 96, JC, S, Gr; see note

l. 32. *it*. The agreement of H. 40 and L. 74 makes me prefer 'it' to 'that' (1633). This may well be a misreading of the spelling 'yt' found in Group I.

34 runne:] runne. 1633

35 makes] draws JC, Hayward see note

l. 35. *makes*. The reading 'draws', which Mr. Hay ward adopted from Sg, occurs also in H.K.I. Sloane 1792 and Bodleian MS. *Eng. Poet e 37*. It is also found in JC (and D. 17) which I suspect to be the source of the reading. In face of the agreement of H. 40, L. 74, I, II, and III it is impossible to reject 'makes'. Repetition is by no means uncharacteristic of Donne's style.

ll. 35–36. The fixed foot both makes the circle perfect and brings the wandering foot back to itself.