

Then thy sick taper will begin to wink,<sup>o</sup>  
And he whose thou art then, being tired before,  
Will, if thou stir, or pinch to wake him, think  
Thou call'st for more,  
10 And in false sleep will from thee shrink,  
And then, poor aspen wretch,<sup>2</sup> neglected thou  
Bathed in a cold quicksilver sweat<sup>3</sup> wilt lie  
A verier<sup>o</sup> ghost than I;  
What I will say, I will not tell thee now,  
15 Lest that preserve thee; and since my love is spent,  
I had rather thou shouldst painfully repent,  
Than by my threatenings rest still innocent.

flicker

truer

1633

### A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning<sup>1</sup>

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;  
5 So let us melt, and make no noise,  
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;  
'Twere profanation<sup>o</sup> of our joys  
To tell the laity our love.  
Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears,  
10 Men reckon what it did and meant;  
But trepidation of the spheres,  
Though greater far, is innocent.<sup>2</sup>  
Dull sublunary<sup>3</sup> lovers' love  
(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit  
15 Absence, because it doth remove  
Those things which elemented<sup>o</sup> it.  
But we, by a love so much refined  
That our selves know not what it is,  
Inter-assurèd of the mind,  
20 Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.  
Our two souls therefore, which are one,  
Though I must go, endure not yet

desecration

composed

2. Aspen leaves flutter in the slightest breeze.  
3. Sweating in terror; quicksilver (mercury) was a stock prescription for venereal disease, and sweating was part of the cure.  
1. For "valediction" see p. 1244, n. 1. Izaak Walton speculated that this poem was addressed to Donne's wife on the occasion of his trip to the Continent in 1611, but there is no proof of that. Donne was, however, apprehensive about that trip; Walton also heard that, while abroad, Donne had a

startling vision of his wife holding a dead baby at about the time she gave birth to a stillborn child.  
2. Earthquakes cause damage and were thought to be portentous. Trepidation (in the Ptolemaic cosmology, an oscillation of the ninth or crystalline sphere imparted to all the inner spheres), though a much more violent motion than an earthquake, is neither destructive nor sinister.  
3. Beneath the moon, therefore earthly, sensual, and subject to change.

A breach, but an expansion,  
Like gold to airy thinness beat.  
25 If they be two, they are two so  
As stiff twin compasses<sup>4</sup> are two;  
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show  
To move, but doth, if th' other do.

And though it in the center sit,  
30 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;  
35 Thy firmness makes my circle just,  
And makes me end where I begun.

1633

### The Ecstasy<sup>1</sup>

Where, like a pillow on a bed,  
A pregnant bank swelled up to rest  
The violet's reclining head,  
Sat we two, one another's best.  
5 Our hands were firmly cemented  
With a fast balm<sup>o</sup> which thence did spring,  
Our eye-beams<sup>2</sup> twisted, and did thread  
Our eyes upon one double string;  
So to intergraft our hands, as yet  
10 Was all our means to make us one,  
And pictures in our eyes to get<sup>o</sup>  
Was all our propagation.<sup>3</sup>  
As 'twixt two equal armies Fate  
Suspends uncertain victory,  
15 Our souls (which to advance their state  
Were gone out) hung 'twixt her and me;  
And whilst our souls negotiate there,  
We like sepulchral statues lay;  
All day the same our postures were,  
20 And we said nothing all the day.

perspiration

beget

4. The two legs of a geometer's or draughtsman's compass. This simile is the most famous example of the "metaphysical conceit" (see "Figurative language," in the "Literary Terminology" appendix to this volume).  
1. From *ekstasis* (Greek), a movement of the soul

outside of the body.  
2. Invisible shafts of light, thought of as going out of the eyes and thereby enabling one to see things.  
3. Reflections of each in the other's eyes, often called "making babies."

If any, so by love joined  
That he soul's language understood,  
And by good love were grown all mind,<sup>4</sup>  
Within convenient distance stood,  
25 He (though he know not which soul spake,  
Because both meant, both spake the same)  
Might thence a new concoction<sup>5</sup> take,  
And part far purer than he came.

This ecstasy doth unperplex,  
30 We said, and tell us what we love;  
We see by this it was not sex;  
We see we saw not what did move;<sup>6</sup>

But as all several<sup>6</sup> souls contain  
Mixture of things, they know not what,  
35 Love these mixed souls doth mix again,  
And makes both one, each this and that.

A single violet transplant,  
The strength, the color, and the size  
(All which before was poor and scant)  
40 Redoubles still, and multiplies.

When love with one another so  
Interinanimates two souls,  
That abler soul, which thence doth flow,  
Defects of loneliness controls.

45 We then, who are this new soul, know  
Of what we are composed and made,  
For th' atomies<sup>6</sup> of which we grow  
Are souls, whom no change can invade.

But O alas, so long, so far  
50 Our bodies why do we forbear?  
They are ours, though they are not we; we are  
The intelligences, they the sphere.<sup>6</sup>

We owe them thanks because they thus  
Did us to us at first convey,  
55 Yielded their forces, sense, to us,  
Nor are dross to us, but allay.<sup>7</sup>

On man heaven's influence works not so  
But that it first imprints the air:<sup>8</sup>

4. On this higher love, see Bembo's ladder of love from *The Courtier*, p. 579.  
5. In the alchemical sense of sublimation or purification.  
6. In Ptolemaic astronomy, each planet, set in a transparent "sphere" that revolved and so carried

it around the earth, was inhabited by a controlling angelic "intelligence."  
7. "Dross" is an impurity that weakens metal; "allay" (alloy) strengthens it.  
8. Astrological influences were thought to work on people through the medium of the surrounding air.

motivate us

separate

components

So soul into the soul may flow,  
60 Though it to body first repair.<sup>9</sup> go  
As our blood labors to beget  
Spirits<sup>9</sup> as like souls as it can,  
Because such fingers need<sup>9</sup> to knit *are needed*  
That subtle knot which makes us man,

65 So must pure lovers' souls descend  
T' affections, and to faculties  
Which sense may reach and apprehend;  
Else a great prince in prison lies.

To our bodies turn we then, that so  
70 Weak men on love revealed may look;  
Love's mysteries<sup>1</sup> in souls do grow,  
But yet the body is his book.

And if some lover, such as we,  
Have heard this dialogue of one,<sup>2</sup>  
75 Let him still mark<sup>9</sup> us; he shall see *observe*  
Small change when we are to bodies gone.

1633

### The Funeral

Whoever comes to shroud me, do not harm  
Nor question much  
That subtle wreath of hair which crowns my arm;  
The mystery, the sign you must not touch,  
5 For 'tis my outward soul,  
Viceroy to that, which then to heaven being gone,  
Will leave this to control,  
And keep these limbs, her<sup>1</sup> provinces, from dissolution.

For if the sinewy thread<sup>2</sup> my brain lets fall  
10 Through every part  
Can tie those parts and make me one of all,  
These hairs which upward grew, and strength and art  
Have from a better brain,  
Can better do it; except<sup>9</sup> she meant that I *unless*  
15 By this should know my pain,  
As prisoners then are manacled, when they're condemned to die.

Whate'er she meant by it, bury it with me,  
For since I am

9. Subtle substances thought to be produced by the blood to serve as intermediaries between body and soul.  
1. The implied comparison is with God's mysteries, which are revealed and may be read in the book of Nature and the book of Scripture.

2. "Dialogue of one" because "both meant, both spake the same" (line 26).  
1. The soul's, but also the mistress's (cf. "she," line 14).  
2. The nervous system.