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Paronomasia celata  
in Donne's "A Valediction: forbidding mourning"

Provided that it is given a little paronomastic twist, the beginning of Donne's verse-letter "To Sir Henry Wotton" serves to illuminate a central idea of his famous "Valediction" poem: "Sir, more than kisses, letters mingle Soules;/For, thus, friends absent speake."<sup>1</sup> In replacing kisses with letter-writing as a way of *speaking*, Donne implicitly refers to the lips forming sounds or letters, the elements of speech.<sup>2</sup> (Such an ambiguous reference to "letters" does not come as a surprise in a poem that ends with a pun on the poet's own name.) "A Valediction: forbidding mourning" is a poem about the mingling of souls; lovers have to part but, spiritually, they cannot be separated.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, however, it is a poem about the "mingling" of letters, that is to say, the language of the poem, by means of paronomasia, reflects and realizes its theme of unity-in-separation. Just as the lovers, seemingly apart, are yet "Interassured of

1. Quoted from *The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters*, ed. W. Milgate (Oxford, 1967), p. 71. "A Valediction: forbidding mourning" and other poems are quoted from Helen Gardner's edition of *The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets* (Oxford, 1965). Ted-Larry Pebworth and Claude J. Summers, "'Thus Friends absent Speake': The Exchange of Verse Letters between John Donne and Henry Wotton," *Modern Philology*, 81 (1984), 361-77, quote from a letter to Sir Henry Goodyere in which Donne expresses his belief that the writing of letters may be "a kind of extasie, and a departure and secession and suspension of the soul, which doth then communicate it self to two bodies" (361).

2. Another example of Donne's punning on *letter* may be found in "A Valediction: of the Booke": "Study our manuscripts, those Myriades/Of letters, which have past twixt thee and me,/Thence write our Annals" (10-12). For the connotative potential of the word, see Inge Leimberg, "The Letter Lost in George Herbert's 'The Jews'," *Studies in Philology* 90 (1993), 298-321.

3. In the words of an elegy numbered among the *dubia* by Gardner, their souls "are ty'd" for they "can love by letters still" ("His Parting from Her," 70-71).

the mind" (l. 19), there are certain common sounds or letters which reveal the connection between two seemingly disparate words. Moreover, as the unity of the lovers is a secret that must not be broadcast to the crowd, the coherence of the words will remain hidden to the "layetic," to those who are insensible to or do not care for the more subtle interplay of sounds and letters.

A similar correspondence exists between theme and imagery. The pair of compasses as an image of the loving couple, for instance, is often cited as a typical example of the metaphysical conceit:<sup>4</sup> the metaphor or comparison (compasses and lovers) may at first seem forced and even far-fetched, but once its point has been grasped, it turns out to be most illuminating and conclusive. But Donne has achieved even more than inventing (or adapting)<sup>5</sup> a typical conceit. If the unexpected connection between remote points of comparison is the hallmark of the baroque conceit, then Donne's famous compasses are an image not only of the lovers but also of the very nature of the conceit itself.

Paronomasia, I should like to suggest, plays an essential part in complementing and enriching this analogy. As will be shown, it serves to connect the very different and seemingly unrelated images of the poem by bringing together different but similar-sounding words. The rhetorical device of paronomasia, like the conceit of the compasses, thus illuminates its own function as well as the subject of the poem. Paronomasia, in other words, substantiates on the level of *verba* what is put forward by the conceit on the level of poetic *res*.

4. Its history as an example begins with Dr. Johnson, to whom it was typical of the "ingenious absurdity" of metaphysical poetry. See William Edinger, "Johnson on Conceit: The Limits of Particularity," *ELH*, 39 (1972), 597-619, esp. pp. 602-04. For a modern discussion of the conceit in which Donne's compasses serve as paradigm, see S. L. Bethell, "The Nature of Metaphysical Wit," *Northern Miscellany of Literary Criticism*, 1 (1953), 19-40, rpr. in *Discussions of John Donne*, ed. Frank Kermode (Boston, 1962), pp. 136-49 (p. 148).

5. Donne's image has been traced back to Guarini's Madrigal 96 by Mario Praz, *Secentismo e marinismo in Inghilterra* (Florence, 1925), p. 109, n. 1, Josef Lederer, "John Donne and the Emblematic Practice," *Review of English Studies*, 22 (1946), 182-200, esp. p. 187, and D. C. Allen, "Donne's Compass Figure," *Modern Language Notes*, 71 (1956), 256-57. See Donald L. Guss, "Donne's Conceit and Petrarchan Wit," *PMLA*, 78 (1963), 308-14, esp. pp. 310-11, for the way in which Donne transforms the meaning of the image as he found it in his "source." Donne replaces Guarini's image of the speaker as a pair of compasses by an image of mutual dependence between the lover and his lady.

## II

As is well known, in the age of Donne, Latin was still regarded as the language most appropriate not only for learned treatises but also, to a considerable extent, for poetry.<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, Latin was the language of people who had at least some education (like the "understander" of Chapman's Homer); it was not the language of the "layetic" in a wider sense of the word. On the other hand, however, it was an international language, a means of communication for those who, far from England, "romed" about the Continent. Herbert and Milton are perhaps the most prominent examples of seventeenth-century poets writing Latin verse besides English; Donne himself wrote several Latin poems (and made ample use of the Vulgate in his sermons). It is not surprising, then, that in their English poetry many Renaissance writers take advantage of the opportunities for wordplay arising from the juxtaposition of the two languages. Alastair Fowler gives a delightful example from Spenser's *Amoretti*. In Sonnet 64, "Elizabeth's neck smells 'like [to] a bunch of columbines' because these are white—but also because *collum* means neck."<sup>7</sup>

As this example shows, Anglo-Latin puns may be characterized by two elements or stages: first, the sound of an English word resembles that of a Latin one (however different in meaning), while, secondly, the reader has to translate an English word in order to become aware of the hidden pun.<sup>8</sup> A great amount of wit may be shown in combining and refining these two elements, as can be seen in an example from George Herbert. In "The Quidditie," Herbert gives a series of (negative) answers to the question, "what is a verse?" Now, this very question is expressed by the title of the poem: "quid" of course means "what," and "dittie" is (or was, in Herbert's time) just another word for "verse."<sup>9</sup> In his satirical *Catalogus librorum aulicorum*, Donne him-

6. See, for instance, J. W. Binns' introduction to *The Latin Poetry of English Poets*, ed. J. W. Binns (London and Boston, 1974), p. vii. For a general assessment of the role of Latin, see Binns's *Intellectual Culture in Elizabethan and Jacobean England: The Latin Writings of the Age* (Leeds, 1990), esp. ch. 1.

7. Alastair Fowler, *Conceitful Thought* (Edinburgh, 1975), p. 96.

8. K. K. Ruthven, in his discussion of etymological conceits (*The Conceit* [London, 1969], pp. 38-41), only takes into account familiar latinate words being used in an unfamiliar Latin sense. But "etymological" conceits involving Latin synonyms of English words are also quite common, as Fowler's example shows.

9. OED †2.b., †3. I am indebted to Inge Leimberg for this example.

self—on a somewhat cruder level of wit—testifies to the currency of such interlinguistic puns when he credits the learned jurist Baldus with having written a treatise “*in laudem Calvitij*,” in praise of baldness.<sup>10</sup> The example also shows that Anglo-Latin wordplay may have either language as its starting point.

The interplay of the two languages can be based on etymology or pseudo-etymology even when it has nothing to do with the derivation of an English word from a Latin one. In Herbert’s poem on “Hope,” which describes an exchange of gifts between the speaker and personified Hope, the speaker, for his “viall full of tears” is given only “a few green eares” in return. Why is this such an apt present for Hope to give? Of course green ears of corn symbolize future growth and the expectation of a rich harvest, but the first reason lies in the word itself, as Varro explains in his *De lingua Latina* (5.37): “from *spes* ‘hope’ comes *spicae* ‘ears of grain.’”<sup>11</sup> The counterpart to this derivation, the homonymic “etymology” of *spes*, will be of further interest with regard to Donne’s poem. For the moment, suffice it to say that the example from Herbert’s “Hope” shows us that Latin wordplay may even be found in a poem without any English word sounding like the Latin one on which the pun is made. This is *paronomasia celata* indeed: the Latin synonym (*spes*) of an English word (hope) reads or sounds like another Latin word (*spicae*) which is represented by its English synonym (green ears). It is somewhat difficult to determine the place of this kind of device within the framework of classical or Renaissance rhetoric. Perhaps it is best described as a scheme analogous to the trope of *metalepsis* or *transumptio*, terms which refer to rhetorical figures consisting of two stages;<sup>12</sup> as in our case *paronomasia* is based on (unspoken) *synonymia*. The implicit reference to several similar-sounding words in another language is a sophisticated form of the unspoken pun based on the synonymy of two or more English

10. John Donne, *The Courtier’s Library, or Catalogus Librorum Aulicorum incomparabilium et non vendibilium*, ed. Evelyn Mary Simpson (London, 1930), p. 38. I am grateful to Christiane Gillham for drawing my attention to this *jeu d’esprit*.

11. Loeb edition, trans. Roland G. Kent (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), I, 37. Herbert’s poems are quoted from F. E. Hutchinson’s edition (Oxford, 1941; rpt. 1945).

12. See Quintilian 8.6.37; cf. Lee A. Sonnino, *A Handbook to Sixteenth-Century Rhetoric* (London, 1968), pp. 186–87. Puttenham calls it “the *farfet*” (itself a metaphorical term stressing local distance) in *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed. Gladys D. Willcock and Alice Walker (Cambridge, Eng., 1936), pp. 183–84.

words and their various shades of meaning, which M. M. Mahood has shown to be a characteristic feature of Shakespeare’s wordplay.<sup>13</sup>

### III

The first indication of this kind of intricate device in Donne’s “A Valediction: forbidding mourning” is given by the title, which functions as a signpost drawing attention to the Latin language as well as to homonymic wordplay. According to the *OED*, the word *valédiction* is first documented in a letter by Donne addressed to Sir Henry Goodyer in 1614;<sup>14</sup> Donne here speaks of his “valédiction to the world” before taking orders. Especially if we take it for granted that his “Valediction” poems were written before 1614, there are good reasons to assume that it was Donne who newly formed this word out of Latin *vale* and *dicere*. *Diction*, in Donne’s time, simply meant “word” as well as “speech” (*OED* †1., †3.), and *vale* is derived from *valere*, which means not only “to be well” but also “to mean, signify”—another reference to the fact that language itself becomes the theme and that the “Valediction” is indeed a case of veiled diction.

The very existence of the word *valédiction* may be due to paronomasia, for there is another, very similar expression of Latin origin, which is much older. Donne links both words in his sermon on Psalm 6 (1623): “*Discedite à me, Depart from me all ye workers of iniquity*; here is then first . . . a valédiction, with a malediction, with an imprecation of Gods Justice.”<sup>15</sup> Both literally and homonymically, the title of our poem contains a malediction or imprecation, for the word *forbid* could mean “to lay under a ban, curse, interdict” (*OED* 2.†f.).<sup>16</sup> The Latin

13. *Shakespeare’s Wordplay* (London, 1957; rpt. 1988), pp. 24–26. One of Mahood’s most fruitful examples, however, is Herbert’s “Love (III),” which “is built upon the ordinary and the Eucharistic meanings of the word *host* which nowhere occurs in the poem” (pp. 24–25). Mahood also points out that Shakespeare’s puns often add strength to the connection between his poetic images (see, e.g., pp. 22, 25).

14. See *Letters to Several Persons of Honour* (1651; rpt. Delmar, 1977), p. 197.

15. *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. Evelyn M. Simpson and George R. Potter (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1953), VI, no. 1, pp. 42–43.

16. For the near-synonyms “forbidding” and “malediction” see Simon Pelegromius, *Synonymorum sylvia*, second ed. (1603). Under “to Curse, to Banne, to Excommunicate” he has “Interdictio subijcere” [sic] and under “to curse, to Wish ill” he gives “Male dicere” (p. 81); one also finds “Maledictions” listed under “Cursings” (p. 82) and “Interdicere” under “to Forbid” (p. 157).

word *interdictio* refers to what is cursed and what is forbidden. This meaning is still familiar to us from the witches' curse in *Macbeth* (1.3.21): "He shall live a man forbid." Donne's title, we conclude, implies *paronomasia* and *synonymia* in close connection.

But this is not all. Perhaps the most obvious pun occurs in the last word of the title. In one of the manuscripts of the poem<sup>17</sup> the title reads "Valediction against Mourning," which is even more ambiguous, since in the seventeenth century *against* could have an explicitly temporal meaning.<sup>18</sup> Izaak Walton, who quotes Donne's poem shortly before the account of his spiritual conversion, deliberately precludes the ambiguity of "mo[u]rning" by changing the title into "A Valediction: forbidding to mourn."<sup>19</sup>

The pun seems to have been disregarded by critics. For example, it does not even attract John Freccero's attention, who points out that the poem "resembles the medieval *congé d'amour*, wherein a lover takes leave of his lady and consoles her by claiming that they are not really two individuals, but rather affirms that they are one."<sup>20</sup> In the context of Donne's *Songs and Sonnets*, however, another closely related genre is knit up with the *congé*: the *aubade* or *Tagelied*. "The Sunne rising," for instance, in which the "Busie old foole, unruly Sunne" is chided (or cursed, or forbidden), does not openly allude to death like "A Valediction: forbidding mourning" but it speaks about impending loss just as much as, conversely, our poem speaks about erotic love.<sup>21</sup>

The homonymic wordplay, *mourning* and *morning*, may thus be regarded as a concealed allusion to the identity of love and death, of *l'amour* and *la mort*, which is one of the classic, one might even say, inescapable themes of love poetry whenever it genuinely strives to express human experience.<sup>22</sup> A well-known example is Romeo's taking leave of Juliet (3.5), a scene in which forebodings of death

17. A. 25, see Gardner, p. 62.

18. See *OED* †17. "Drawing towards, near the beginning of, close to." *OED* 18. is still current: "In view of; in anticipation of; in preparation for, in time for."

19. *Walton's Lives of Dr. John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Mr. Richard Hooker, Mr. George Herbert, and Dr. Robert Sanderson*, ed. A. H. Bullen (London, 1884), pp. 29–30.

20. John Freccero, "Donne's 'Valediction: forbidding mourning'," *ELH*, 30 (1963), 335–76 (p. 353).

21. Another example is "The Sunne Rising" with its mournful line, "Must to thy motions lovers seasons run" (4).

22. Cf. Inge Leimberg, "'Golden Apollo, a Poor Humble Swain': A Study of Names in *The Winter's Tale*," *Shakespeare Jahrbuch West* (1991), 135–58, referring to Ronsard, *Sonnets pour Hélène* 2.77 (p. 156).

loom large. The lark, which in Romeo's words is "the herald of the morn," becomes the herald of mourning (cf. *OED* *mourn*, *n.* *Obs.* "Sorrow, lamentation, grief, mourning"). The speaker of "A Valediction: forbidding mourning" describes the process of spiritual refinement which enables the lovers to "Care lesse, eyes, lips, and hands to misse" (20). But at the same time, as critics have pointed out, words like "go," "melt," "foot," and "erect"<sup>23</sup> homonymically refer to the bodily sphere characteristic of Donne's *Elegies* and *aubades*. Allan Tate even went so far as to say that the pun "to die," implying ecstasy as well as final separation, is the "mover" of the poem, "its propeller, its efficient cause" (p. 80). It may be remarked that this word does not actually occur in the poem. *Paronomasia* is unobtrusive; it "make[s] no noise," but nevertheless, as the title shows, its important function is asserted from the beginning.

In "A Valediction: forbidding mourning" Donne transposes, as Geoffrey Hartman has observed, the theme of duality, or of two-in-one, "onto the level of language as such," blending "a Latinate dimension . . . still felt in the term 'valédiction'" with a "virtuoso use of the developing everyday language."<sup>24</sup> This blending of, as well as tension between, Latin and English is one of the verbal signals given by the title. Another one is the use of homonymic wordplay in each of its three main words.

#### IV

The combination of two rhetorical figures based on similarity or near-identity, however, is not confined to the title. It supplies, as it were, the linguistic bridge between the different fields of imagery which follow upon each other in the poem and which, at first sight, may appear so incoherent as to provoke the question whether they have

23. On "go," see Patricia Garland Pinka, *This Dialogue of One: The Songs and Sonnets of John Donne* (University, Alabama, 1982), p. 141, n. 55 (referring to "The Expiration," 7); on "melt," see Pinka, *ibid* (pointing to the connection with "joycs" and referring to "A Valediction: of my Name in the Window," 49–51). On "goe" and "melt," see also Allan Tate, "The Point of Dying: Donne's 'Virtuous Men'," *Sewanee Review*, 51 (1963), 76–81, esp. pp. 78–79, and the response to Tate by Brother Joseph, F. S. C., "Donne's 'A Valediction, forbidding Mourning,' 1–8," *The Explicator*, 16 (1958), item 43. On "foot," cf. "Loves Progress," 73 ff., and on "erect," see Piuka, p. 144. An example of how misleading the sexual overtones of the poem may be is John Docherty, *John Donne, Undone* (London and New York, 1986), pp. 72–75.

24. *Saving the Text* (Baltimore and London, 1981), p. 154.

anything in common besides their reference to the loving couple.<sup>25</sup> In the first stanza of the poem the reader is made aware that life and death depend upon a breath; like the sad friends assembled around the deathbed of a virtuous man we realize that a world of difference may lie between "now" and "no" (Hartman, p. 153), or that, in Donne's own words, "the transposing of words, or syllables, or letters," the shift of "an accent" or a "voice" must not "be thought little, where the consequence may prove great."<sup>26</sup> And yet what seems worlds apart, like *breath* and *death*, may suddenly prove to be closely connected by the sound of the words.

"Breath" is an equivalent of Latin *spiritus*, and it is thus nearly synonymous with *anima*, "soul" (l. 2). But "breath" may also be expressed by the Latin (or rather, Greek) word *aura*; Varro, for instance, cites an example from Pacuvius: "Terra exhalat auram atque auroram humidam" (5.24), the land exhales a breeze (or a breath) and dawning damp. *Aura atque aurora*—*aurora* of course is a metonym (and Latin synonym) of *morning*. The breath or spirit of the dying man is thus, however secretly and indirectly, connected with the "forbidding mo[u]rning." *Lucus a non lucendo*, one might say, the light of the morning, traditionally regarded as a sign of resurrection and the coming of Christ,<sup>27</sup> is what truly forbids mourning. In addition, *aurora* is the bride of the Song of Songs: "quae est ista quae progreditur quasi aurora consurgens" (6.9), "who is she that looketh forth as the morning" (6.10 in the Authorized Version).

Donne's theme, the spiritualization of love, is thus verbally linked to the religious sphere not just by means of expressions like "layetic" but also by a carefully designed pattern of Latin references. *Aura* is a slight movement of the air, in Isidore's words, "Aura ab aere dicta, quasi aëria, quod lenis sit motus aëris" (13.11.17). No "sigh-tempests"

25. The disparity of the images has frequently been commented upon. See, for example, Eugene R. Cunnar, "Donne's 'Valediction: forbidding Mourning' and the Golden Compasses of Alchemical Creation," *Literature and the Occult: Essays in Comparative Literature*, ed. Luanne Frank (Arlington, 1977), pp. 72–110 (p. 73); David Novarr, *The Disinterred Muse: Donne's Texts and Contexts* (Ithaca and London, 1980), p. 56; and A. B. Chambers, "Glorified Bodies and the 'Valediction: forbidding Mourning,'" *John Donne Journal*, 1 (1982), 1–20 (p. 1).

26. *Sermons* [1958], IX, no. 2, pp. 71–72.

27. In mystical theology the interpretation of *aurora* as the color of the incarnation of Christ is particularly emphasized by Hildegard of Bingen. See the article "Aurora" (II.1.b) in the forthcoming *Lexikon mittelalterlicher Farbenbedeutungen* by Christel Meier-Staubach and Rudolf Suntrup. I am grateful to both authors for letting me see their manuscript, from which I also gleaned the sources given in notes 28–30.

then but *motus lenis*. Donne takes up this image again in the sixth stanza, in which the two souls of the lovers, "which are one," are compared to "gold to ayery thinnesse beate" (l. 24). If the gentle breath (of the virtuous men as well as the lovers) may be regarded as *aura*, here is its etymon, *aer*. But the fabric is woven even closer. What is the etymology of the Latin word for gold? Cassiodorus reports the traditional view that *aurum* is derived from *aura* because of its splendor; this derivation can also be found in Isidore: "Gold (*aurum*) comes from *aura*, that is, from the splendour, because through this reflected splendour it makes the air shine."<sup>28</sup>

The etymological (or homonymic) relationships come full circle when we realize that *aurora*, also because of its splendor, is derived from *aurum*, gold: "aurora . . . quasi hora aurea."<sup>29</sup> Still, this is not all. The lovers' parting from each other in the morning, their gentle breath, the faint breeze as opposed to "teare-floods" and "sigh-tempests" (6)—all this is connected with the image of "gold to ayery thinnesse beate" not only through the verbal relation between *aurora*, *aura*, and *aurum*. The silence of the lovers' parting is stressed from the beginning. There is only a "whisper"; they "make no noise," and, like the friends in stanza one, we must listen most attentively to the faint sounds uttered. In addition, unheard celestial "trepidation" is contrasted with the uproar of earthquakes. The image of the gold leaf continues this emphasis on silence, for it has traditionally been regarded as one of the most remarkable qualities of gold that it does not make a sound when beaten.<sup>30</sup> Low noise and attentive listening are thus emphasized as an ongoing motif, which also turns up in the last image, the comparison of the lovers to a pair of compasses. The "fixt foot" (27) only apparently remains passive, while in fact it follows the other's movement: "It leans, and hearkens after it" (31). The first meaning of *to hearken* given by the *OED* is "To apply the ears to hear," and in the specific sense implied here (*OED* †6. *intr.*) it means, "to

28. "Aurum ab aura dictum, id est ab splendore, eo quod repercusso aëra plus fulgeat" (CCL 97, 655–56). Isidore (*Etymologiae*, ed. W. M. Lindsay [Oxford, 1911] 16.18.1) goes on to quote Vergil's *Aeneid* (6.204): "Discolor inde auri per ramos aura refulsit."

29. Gilbertus Foliot, PL 202, 1285 B. Cf. also Nikolaus Kempf, *Expositiones mysticae in Cantica canticorum*, ed. Bernhard Pez, 3 vols. (Regensburg, 1723–1740), 12.160: "quasi auri aut aurea hora: quia tunc apparet color aureus in aëre aut in coelo."

30. Hugo de S. Charo, *Postilla super Apocalypsim, Opera* (Lyon, 1645), VII, fol. 369ra: "percussum non resonat." See also Petrus Berchorius Pictavensis, *Reductorium morale, Opera omnia* (Cologne, 1731), II, 15.21.

seek to hear tidings." "Eyes, lips, and hands," then, may be parted with, but not the ear. Donne hides quite a number of English *ears* in his text: there are (to name only the homographs) "teare-floods" (6), "th'earth" (9), "fears" (9), "spears" (11), and "hearkens." Less conspicuously, the Latin synonym fits into the pattern of homophones secretly at work in this poem. The circle of *aurora*, *aura*, *aurum* is completed by *auris*, the ear, that circular (or rather spiral)<sup>31</sup> organ that must be applied if sense is to be made of ab-sence. Donne's wordplay is not without classical example. As Frederick Ahl has shown, the story of Cephalus and Procris in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*—a story of absence, return, and married constancy—is woven around homophones of *aur-* [ɔ:r],<sup>32</sup> a syllable or sound which is also, beginning with the many variations on Laura's name, one of the hallmarks of love poetry in the Petrarchan tradition.<sup>33</sup>

## V

Intertwined with this pattern is a second strand of Latin homonyms that secretly connects the images of the poem. In the first two stanzas, we remember, both *aura* and *spiritus* come into play as Latin equivalents for the air or breath that moves almost imperceptibly. *Spiritus* is the Latin word for the breath of the dying man, which is identified with his soul leaving the body.<sup>34</sup> The spirit of the dying man is evoked to underscore the spiritual nature of the lovers' union, an idea which informs expressions like "nor sigh-tempests," "refined,"<sup>35</sup> "ayery thinness." It is, so to speak, the *breath* which prevents, as yet, a *breach*

31. Cf. Sir Thomas Browne's remarks on the ear in one of his miscellaneous writings: "the whole circumduction of the eare, is called *Helix*: the interior circumduction, wch compasseth the *concha*, is the *Anthelix*." *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London, 1964), III, 335.

32. *Metaformations: Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets* (Ithaca, 1985), pp. 204–11.

33. See Hugo Friedrich, *Epochen der italienischen Lyrik* (Frankfurt, 1964), pp. 196–99.

34. John Freccero discusses the concept of *pneuma*, or *spiritus* (pp. 357–63), "the mysterious substance which was connected to be the medium of the soul's action to the body, as well as the medium of the planetary soul's action on the heavenly body" (p. 357). On the identity of *anima* and *spiritus*, see Isidore 11.1.7–10.

35. On the alchemical implications of the poem, see especially Freccero and Cunmar, and the note by Urmilla Khanna, "Donne's 'A Valdeicrion: forbidding Mourning'—Some Possible Alchemical Allusions," *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 17 (1970), 404–05.

(23) between the lovers. At the same time, biblical connotations must not be forgot: in the Sermon on the Mount, the *spiritus sanctus* is announced to those who mourn (Matthew 5.4).<sup>36</sup>

The contrast between the sensual earth(ly) movement typical of "dull sublunary lovers love" and the refined love compared to "trepidation of the spheares" continues the idea of spiritualization. Again, a Latin pun provides the connection: *spiritus* is closely related to *spirare* (to breathe, live); and *spira-* and *sphaera* (from Greek *speira*) are nearly identical in sound.<sup>37</sup> *Spira* as a noun, however, means "spiral," and the spiral is the very movement of the compasses described in the last two stanzas of the poem. For their movement is both radial ("far doth come home")—"comes home") and circular ("makes my circle just"), a juxtaposition of geometrical images which, taken together, result in a spiral pattern.<sup>38</sup> Like the pair of compasses, the spiral is an emblem of two contrasting elements brought together, the radial movement being traditionally connected with the body and our physical nature, and the circle with the soul, with spiritual or divine perfection.<sup>39</sup> Lancelot Andrewes, in one of his sermons on the sending of the Holy Ghost, describes the circular movement of the spirit in a paraphrase of Ecclesiastes 1.5–6: "it goeth forth, and . . . 'compasseth round about,' and then at last . . . it returneth *per circuitos suos*."<sup>40</sup>

Returning once more from things to words, one may add that *spirare* means "to speak," as well as "to breathe, to live." In the Book

36. Cf. Isidore 7.3.11, who also quotes Matthew 9.15, a passage highly relevant to the theme of a lover's or husband's valediction: "Tunc lugebunt filii sponsi, cum ab eis ablatus fuerit sponsus."

37. Cf. Isidore 7.3.2. The Song of Songs (2.17) provides an interesting connection between *spirare* and morning. Where the Authorized Version has "Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn my beloved," in the Vulgate the verse begins, "Donec adspiret dies et inclinentur umbrae."

38. Cf. Freccero, p. 241, quoting a most pertinent passage from Chalcidius' Latin commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*. Freccero's discussion of the spiral movement has been taken up again by Eileen Reeves, "John Donne and the Oblique Course," *Renaissance Studies*, 7 (1993), 168–83, who is mainly concerned with the *motus obliquus* in contemporary navigation and cartography. Her interesting remarks on cartographic *translatio* (pp. 176–77) may have greater relevance to the poem in the light of Donne's Anglo-Latin wordplay.

39. See Marvin Morillo, "Donne's Compasses: Circles and Right Lines," *English Language Notes*, 3 (1966), 173–76, referring to Sir Thomas Browne's *Garden of Cyrus* and his discussion of "the circular motions of souls and the 'rectilinear' motions of bodies" in Plato's *Timaeus* (p. 176).

40. *The Works of Lancelot Andrewes* (Oxford, 1854), III, 120. Accordingly, the spirit is the prototype of him who ends where he began.

of Genesis, for example, the divine word that inspires creation is identified with life itself.<sup>41</sup> *Spirare* also denotes poetic utterance, inspired speech,<sup>42</sup> and we may sense here, as in "Valediction," a reference to the poetic word itself, in which the refined love finds expression and which is the medium of mental inter-assurance between the lovers. The assurance of a common language, which may even be unconscious to the lovers themselves ("our selves know not what it is," 18), warrants their hope of a final reunion.

How does the language of the poem represent this hope? Again, concealed paronomasia may be seen at work. Besides "spheare" or *sphaera*, the *spira* of the compasses and the spirit or breathing of the virtuous men and of the lovers, there is yet another, very similar Latin word which directly refers to the idea in question. A familiar punning device or motto, used by the contemporary publishers Thomas Creede and Richard Olive, for instance, points out the connection: "Dum spiro, spero," I am hopeful as long as I breathe (or speak, or make poetry).<sup>43</sup> A similar pun provides the *raison d'être* for the emblem of "Good Hopes" from George Wither's *Collection of Emblemes*.<sup>44</sup> The compasses signify the virtue of *constantia*, assigned by Donne's speaker to his beloved who faithfully follows his course. But I am certain that the similarity between *sphaera* or *spira* and *spes* (or *spero*) is the reason why this image expresses hope in addition to labor and constancy. Isidore, once more, presents irrefutable evidence for this. We remember Varro's deriving *spicae* (ears of corn) from *spes*,

41. Cf. Freccero, pp. 358–59, n. 59. The connection is expressly made in Genesis 2.7, "inspiravit in faciem eius spiraculum vitae." See also Donne's sermon on Lamentations 4.20 (*Sermons*, IV, [1959], 9, p. 255): "And then the breath of our nostrils is expressed by this word in this Text, *Ruach, spiritus, speech, and life*, so it is his. When the breath of life was first breathed into man, there it is called by another word, *Neshamah*, and that is the *soule*, the immortal soule."

42. Cf. the poet addressing his Muse in Horace, *Carmina* 4.3.24: "quod spiro et placeo, si placeo, tuum est."

43. My example is the title page of Emanuel Forde's *Parismus* (1598; one of the possible sources of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*), fully quoted by Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, (London, 1958), II, 363. See also the references in Hans Walther, *Proverbia sententiaeque Latinitatis Medii Aevi* (Göttingen, 1963), I, items 6723 and 6724.

44. *A Collection of Emblemes Ancient and Moderne* (1635), Book 3, illustr. IX (p. 143). Karl Josef Hölting, *Aspects of the Emblem* (Kassel, 1986), points out that Wither's emblem, as well as its source, Rollenhagen's *Nucleus emblematum* (1613), "has less bearings upon the poem than is generally assumed" (p. 70) as it was published only after the poem was written and has a different thematic emphasis. Nevertheless, I think it provides a parallel to Donne's implicit connection of hope and the circle by means of wordplay.

which is alluded to in George Herbert's "Hope." Isidore, in turn, provides us with the etymology of *spes* itself. This etymology is visualized by Donne's image of the compasses with the "fixt foot" giving direction to the "roaming" foot which proceeds upon its circular course. "Spes," writes Isidore, "vocata quod sit pes progrediendi," because it is a foot with which to proceed, "quasi 'est pes'" (8.2.5). The foot, *pes*, however, is a synonym as well as homonym of *passus*; "compasses," a word that is related to *compassion*, as well as to *passion*, thus contains the very word from which "hope" is derived.<sup>45</sup>

Donne begins his poem with the *passing* away of virtuous men and he ends it with the conceit of a pair of *compasses*. Quite literally, then, he ends where he began; the circular movement of which he speaks is reflected by the language itself. Yet another indication of this self-reflective character of the poem is the number of lines, 36, which has been taken as a reference to the 360 degrees of the full circle or to the 36,000 years of the cosmic year.<sup>46</sup>

The importance of letters in this context (the verbal reflection of beginning and end) is underlined by Jay Dean Divine's observation that the circle drawn by the compasses may be read as an O, while the instrument itself resembles the letter A.<sup>47</sup> Divine's point is confirmed by the fact that in a number of Renaissance picture alphabets the A is represented as a pair of compasses.<sup>48</sup> The poem as a whole, so to speak, begins with a literal A (in the title and in the first line), and ends with a mental or imaginary A and O (the circle which is "just"). It begins with death and ends with an image of hope and eternity.<sup>49</sup> The

45. On *pas* see Freccero's example from Maurice Scève (p. 352).

46. Freccero, p. 355.

47. "Compass and Circle in Donne's 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning,'" *Papers on Language and Literature*, 9 (1973), 78–80. Divine actually speaks of Alpha and Omega.

48. See, e.g., illustrations 187, 188, 190, and 200 (pp. 62–65) in Massin's *Buchstabenbilder und Bildalphabete* (Ravensburg, 1970), showing picture alphabets from Abram of Balmes' *Grammatica hebraea* (Venice, 1523) and Jacobus Publicius' *Artes orandi, epistolandi, memorandi* (Venice, 1482), as well as mnemonic alphabets by Cosmas Rosselius and Johannes Trithemius, reprinted from the *Thesaurus artificiosae memoriae* (Venice, 1579) and *Le Magasin des sciences ou vray art de mémoire decouvert par Schenkelius* (Paris, 1623).

49. See, e.g., Donne's sermon on Matthews 22.30 ([1956], VIII, no. 3, pp. 94–109): "First, then, Christ establishes a Resurrection, *A Resurrection there shall be*, for, that makes up *Gods circle*. The *Body of Man* was the first point that the foot of *Gods compasse* was upon: First, he created the body of *Adam*: and then he carries the *Compass* round, and shuts up where he began, he ends with the *Body of man* again in the glorification thereof in the Resurrection. God is the *Alpha* and *Omega*" (p. 97). The passage is quoted by Chambers (p. 16).

compasses, paragon of the baroque conceit, join things and words which seem separate and even incompatible. They serve as a subtle reference to the divine artificer or geometrician of Genesis and to the A and O of the Book of Revelation (22.13) with its implications of Last Judgement, justification (Rev. 15.3), and eternal life ("makes my circle just"). The point where the legs of the compasses are connected lies beyond the sphere of human understanding ("know not what it is"). In this context of eschatological fulfillment, the very word which alludes most directly to the expected physical reunion of the two lovers ("erect") turns on its own axis and reveals its secret relationship with *resurrect* and *resurrection*; a pun, as J. D. Jahn has reminded us, that can be found, for example, in St. Ambrose as well as Myles Coverdale.<sup>50</sup>

The meeting of extremes, of beginning and end, death and resurrection, body and soul leads up to a final case of *paronomasia celata*. The last line of the poem, "And makes me end, where I begunne," refers to a Latin pun which has come down to us in several variants of a proverbial saying or motto in which the two words *oriri* (to rise, to begin) and *moriri* (to die, to end) are juxtaposed. An example is the motto of the Massey family: *Oriens morior, moriens orior*.<sup>51</sup> T. S. Eliot has two versions of it in "East Coker" (the first and the last sentence), supposedly translated from Mary Stuart's French motto:<sup>52</sup> "in my beginning is my end" and "in my end is my beginning."<sup>53</sup> *Morior* refers back to the dying men at the beginning of the poem, and both

50. "The Eschatological Scene of Donne's 'A Valediction: forbidding Mourning'," *College Literature*, 5 (1978), 34-47 (p. 43); Freccero refers to Albertus Magnus' interpretation of the circular Hebrew letter Samech as *erectio* or hope which raises us up (p. 350).

51. See Erik Kooper, "The Case of the Encoded Author: John Massey in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 83 (1982), 158-68 (p. 166). Other versions of the motto are "morior, dum orior" (item 38343 in Walther's collection, [Göttingen, 1983], VIII), "Quam gloriose moritur, / Qui moriendo oritur" (*L'opera poetica di S. Pier Damiani*, ed. Margareta Lokranz [Stockholm, 1964], B. 18, 2, p. 107), "Sic homo et occasu felici functus et ortu / Terrenis moritur, perpetuis oritur" (Paulinus Nolanus, *Epistulae* 32, c. 5, ll. 17-18; CSEL, XXIX, 279), "aliis moriendo decedentibus, aliis succedentibus oriendo" (Augustinus, *De civitate Dei* 22.1; CCL 98, p. 806). The formula "moritur et oritur" occurs, for instance, in Augustine's *Confessiones* 11.7 (9); CCL 27, p. 199.

52. Her motto, embroidered on the chair of state, was "en ma fin est mon commencement." See Julia Maniates Reibetanz, *A Reading of Eliot's Four Quartets* (Diss. 1970; Ann Arbor, 1983), p. 213, n. 5. The French motto can already be found, for example, in Guillaume de Machaut and is, in all probability, a translation of the Latin.

53. T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London, 1963), pp. 196 and 204.

words, *morior* and *orior*, belong to the *aur/or* pattern to which the poem repeatedly alludes.

Moreover, the two Latin words referring to beginning and end, the one contained in the other (like *ave* in *vale*), make us aware of a secret allusion to a certain proper name. The current symbol for gold, *aurum*, as W. A. Murray has shown, was a circle with a central dot or point (or "prick")⊙, clearly suggestive of the compass image.<sup>54</sup> But it was also a musical symbol, known to all practitioners in Donne's time, denoting a "perfect" temporal relation, a semibreve measuring three minims. According to Morley's *Plain and Easy Introduction to Practical Music*, this was called the "More Prolation."<sup>55</sup> *Morior, aurum, More Prolation*—Donne, I should say, with a twinkle in his eye hints at the name of his love, Ann More.<sup>56</sup> This is confirmed by an anagram of "more" describing the speaker's motion: "More" remains constant and compassionate while "the other far doth rome" (30).<sup>57</sup> But this is only a biographical sidelight, a finishing touch to a poem in which the union of souls is truly expressed by a mingling of letters.

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54. W. A. Murray, "Donne's Gold-Leaf and his Compasses," *Modern Language Notes*, 73 (1958), 329-30.

55. Ed. R. Alec Harman, second ed. (New York, 1963), p. 24.

56. It has often been noticed that Donne repeatedly puns on Ann More's name. The examples given by Harry Morris, "John Donne's Terrifying Pun," *Papers on Language and Literature* 9 (1973), 128-37, may be complemented by a witty line from "Love's Infiniteness": "Hee that hath all can have no more" (l. 24).

57. The anagrammatic play on *more* and *rome* was most common. Cf. George Herbert's "Roma, Anagr." in his *Lucus* 25; see also Ahl, p. 139 and *passim*.

