motivation for the particular choice of
metaphors Lawrence is saying, "How could I have
commit this inconsequential, common
One does not raise one’s hand against
one’s self, one hardly justifies it, by calling it a
strategy for doing: so, Lawrence’s
serious divagation of purpose from his
ion. The poem whose set itself up is
Wordsworth and Coleridge’s,
d beyond any boundaries that their
ed. I find no “system” per se that the
very thing to support. I do not particularly
exalt oneself in accordance with Lawrence’s
Lawrence may have felt that what Strm
says, but I think in the face of its
seek the unity of the poem in its
psychic.
If we are willing to accept this,
poem’s aesthetic inconsistency it to be
Dennec’s psychological inability to face the
own act. Having mocked Freud by
chasing the mother into two aspects, Law
ly and in horror to the castrating aspect
ification with the snake. To disaccord
this identification, he then casts the
ior, using demeaning terminology in
simultaneously strengthening and ren
tion of the snake as a god by calling
ards/Of life."
cessful in terms of the aesthetic condi
tions we the profundity of the poet
could be written at all testifies to the
psychologically. The greatness of Law
in its expression of Lawrence’s "doc
e it demonstrates in presenting a sna
fidelity to its psychological

Ambivalence in
John Donne’s Forbidding Mourning

Paradoxical as it may seem, Donne’s poetry is too simple
to satisfy. Its complexity is all on the surface—an intellectual
and fully conscious complexity that we soon come to the
end of. . . . There are puzzles in his work, but we can solve
them all if we are clever enough; there is none of the depth
and ambiguity of real experience in him. . . .

—C. S. Lewis

The stuff of literature is conflict, all kinds of conflict, from
the daring fight over Helen to Prufrock’s self-dared and self-
checked desire for a peach. Conflict is turned loose in poetry
precisely because, in its carefully crafted orderliness, it can
assuage the worst tempests. As John Donne puts it in “The
triple Foole”:

I thought, if I could draw my paines
Through Rimes vexation, I should them allay,
Griefe brought to numbers cannot be so fierce,
For, he tames it, that fetters it in verse. (8-11)

Historically, the critics’ responses to conflict in Donne’s
poetry have been circumscribed by the need to be morally
uplifting; this remains so despite our present emphasis on the
poetic modes of conflict, on ambiguity and irony; it is always
tempting to talk about the modes of conflict while ignoring
part if its substance, no matter what the poem itself suggests.
Though Donne often seems to deny his own ambivalence, he
nevertheless lets it obliquely into his poems, trusting that poetry
has the power to civilize all conflict.

My plan here is to focus on Donne’s “A Valediction: for-

1 All references to C. S. Lewis are from “Donne and Love Poetry in the
Seventeenth Century,” Seventeenth-Century Studies Presented to Sir Herbert
Grierson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1938), pp. 64-84.
2 Quotations of Donne’s poetry are from Sir Herbert Grierson’s revised
bidding mourning.” I will point to a few critics siding away from conflicts they themselves have discovered, and I will then try to show that the poem is indeed powerful enough to “tame” and “fetter” what it contains. I hope to suggest a larger literary unity and larger context for the poem by using psychoanalysis, that branch of learning that is so sensitive to human conflict. We need psychoanalysis, not only because it sensitizes us to the unconscious determinants of both psychic conflict and poetry, but also because it can help us unify, in the best literary sense, the quirky, incongruous elements of Donne’s poem.

Here is the text of “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:

So let us melt, and make no noise,  
No teare-floods, nor sigh-tempests move,  
T’were prophanation of our joyes  
To tell the layetie our love.

Moving of th’ earth brings harms and feares,  
Men reckon what it did and meant,  
But trepidation of the spharees,  
Though greater farre, is innocent.

Dull subluminary lovers’ love  
(Whose soule is sense) cannot admit  
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,  
Care lesse, eyes, lips, and hands to misse.

Our two soules therefore, which are one,  
Though I must goe, endure not yet  
A breach, but an expansion,  
Like gold to any thinnesse beate.
I will point to a few critics whom themselves have discovered, and I will see, the poem is indeed powerful more by what it contains. I hope to amplify and larger context for the poem, that branch of learning that is conflict. We need psychoanalysis, as us to the unconscious determinant in poetry, but also because it can help us sense, the quirky, incongruous device of “A Valediction: forbidding tears”.

men passe mildly away, per to their soles, to goe. of their sad friends doe say, th goes now, and some say, no: slt, and make no noise, louds, nor sigh-tempeasts move, thanation of our joyes e layetie our love.

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we, so much refin’d, elves know not what it is, of the mind, yes, lips, and hands to mise.

therefore, which are one, just goe, endure not yet an expansion, ayery thinness beate.

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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,
Yet when the other far doth rome,
It leans, and hearkens after it,
And growes erect, as that comes home.

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

This poem proceeds by way of a series of analogies and similes. The lovers should part silently, like the soul leaving the body; the separating motion of the lovers is as innocent as the trepidation of the spheres; their spiritual love is like beaten gold; they themselves move according to the principles of “stiff twin compasses.” Each analogy has at least some sense of rightness about it, but (and here is where the trouble starts) each seems equally a blunder, suggesting some underlying conflict in the speaker’s professedly idealistic love.

We shall consider the aptness of Donne’s similes in a moment, but first let us watch one critic stumble over ambivalence only to dismiss it. Here is Wilbur Sanders on the beaten gold simile [stanza 6]:

... what, in all this uniform ‘expansion’ of material, has become of the ‘two soules’? what possible relations can this spatial metaphor have to the woman who sits at home and the man who travels? in what sense it is anything more than a specious gloss upon the pain of being separated? how long can the gold hope to endure no breach, if the expansion goes on?*

And one might add, while criticizing the simile, that Donne has here slipped a joker into his deck by adding the little word "yet"; surely the speaker, without this word, would be more

* References to Wilbur Sanders are from *John Donne’s Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1971), pp. 83-89.
convinced about the unbreachability of his love. True, there is a sense in which the "yet" is appropriate, for one of the lovers will die eventually; that breach is not yet, not now when the separation is merely a voyage. But this qualification is not required by the present situation, so that the speaker only modifies his essential point that the lovers are always "one."

While Sanders has not plumbed the full depths of the simile, he has discovered enough to challenge his thesis that the poem is about "the quick of tender feeling," "a tenderness clean and unsentimental." Instead, he simply drops his problems with beaten gold along with the conflicts they imply. In fact, Sanders raises these problems only parenthetically in a discussion meant to prove that the compass simile "meets all the objections the analogy of the beaten gold was open to." It's not clear how his defense of the compasses explains away the ambiguities suggested by the beaten gold, nor is it clear that he has successfully purged the compass simile of the ambivalence which has provoked "so much puzzled and querulous comment." Consider for example, his attempt to rescue from impurity the line Yet when the other far doth rone; according to Sanders, the voyager, when roaming like the extended leg of the compass, is "performing his prosaic, mechanical, yet necessary function." Now notice that compass legs do not in fact roam, that "rime" suggests something of adventurous infidelity and not merely a mechanical draftsman's exercise or a functional business trip—if Donne needed Sanders' meaning he could have replaced "rime" with "serve," making suitable adjustments for rhyme. It sounds as if the voyager is thinking of infidelity, but Sanders isn't interested in any conflict the lover might be having in maintaining the notion of a pure love, and so he glosses (and glosses over) "rime" to suit in own interpretation. In the final analysis, this method of defending the poem by disposing of its conflicts is not much different from C. S. Lewis's dismissal of Donne's poetry. Critics either like Donne and deny his full complexity, or they dislike him and deny the poetic value of his heterogeneity.

Reading the critics of Donne, I can almost always discover this formula: "...the 'mariage of true minds' [is] celebrated..."
in *The Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*; 4 "there is the firm confidence in mutual love which pervades "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning"; 5 it is Donne's "tenderest" love poem; 6 a poem, says C. S. Lewis, of "ostentatiously virtuous love." Donne is ostentatious, but ostentation is not quite compatible with virtuous love; it's the dazzle-dazzle that fills in for the lack of virtue. In stating the commonplace about "Forbidding Mourning," Lewis is close to a fresh perception of the poem. But what does he do with this interesting psychological situation in which virtue and something darker seem in conflict? Like Johnson and Dryden before him, he finds the conflict not the sort of thing a sensible woman would want to hear, and he dismisses the conflict along with the poem:

You may deny, as perhaps some do, that the romantic concept of 'pure' passion has any meaning; but certainly, if there is such a thing, it is not like this. It does not prove itself by talking about purity. It does not keep on drawing distinctions between spirit and flesh to the detriment of the latter and then explaining why the flesh is, after all, to be used. This is what Donne does, and the result is singularly unpleasant.

Whether one likes or dislikes Donne's protestations of mutual love does not seem to matter; neither type of critic wants to consider the possibility that pure and simple mutual love was only part of Donne's theme.

I think that the unity of "Forbidding Mourning" is to be found precisely in Donne's attempt to fetter his unpleasant fantasies about mutual love by giving them play in his poetic assertions of superior love; unconflicted love would not require any assertions at all, nor any poem. I would guess that Donne was not conscious of the degree of his ambivalent feeling, that unconscious dictates sent his imagination scurrying for just the right images to portray a love that was both attractive and

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repellent. Donne's incongruous heterogeneity may be the product of a split between his conscious and unconscious perception; his strength is his poetic power to braid up that split, to make unity of feeling out of the fact that he both loves and hates the woman to whom he is speaking.

If one looks at the poem from the point of view of a psychoanalyst, one finds that all the similes and analogies are open to criticisms similar to those levied against the beaten gold and the compasses. Ambivalence in the speaker must be inferred, but, paradoxically, this split leads us to literary unity.

The speaker begins by advocating a silent parting resembling the way in which the soul slips out of the body of a virtuous man. Now the souls of virtuous men do not come back to the body for a long, long time, not until the Day of Judgment. One wonders, by way of an analogy that the speaker himself presses, if the voyager unconsciously intends to remain on his earthly voyage for as long as the souls of virtuous men remain in heaven. Note, too, that the analogy requires the lovers to be in some sense relieved by their parting, even to be in a hurry to see it take place. Since “virtuous men” have to hope for fulfillment of a long anticipated salvation, they can hardly wait for their souls “to goe”; the friends may be “sad” about the parting of soul and body, but the dying men, because they are approaching bliss, actively encourage with their last whisper their desired dissolution. The word “sad” on superficial reading seems to serve the occasion of the parting lovers, but, if the analogy of departing souls and departing lovers is followed precisely, we find the lovers happy in their separation while only the onlookers, the “layet,” the analogue to the “friends,” are sad. Presumably, the voyager is, like the virtuous souls, happy to “passe mildly away.” Of this he is unconscious; consciously, he is indeed sad.

The lover’s ambivalence about the coming separation from his mistress surfaces by way of displacement onto the friends, whose divided opinion is a keynote to the poem; some of them say the “breath goes now, and some say no”: the small orthographic difference between now and no signals the poem’s interest in subtle ambivalence, in words, moods, and feelings that look homogeneous but are not. That some voices say one thing and some another mind. Donne violently, as Dr. Johnson put it, would be as delicate as a woman who is about to have a baby.

Donne’s decision to talk about the lover’s suffering in such a way that it is not noticed by him conveys something of his love for his mistress, his love for his conscious self, the poet’s having no separation negates nothing else. One wonders whether the lover is trying to understand we’re phony.

In any case, we can say that metaphorical running of tears and flowers compelling, similitude weeping of flowers and physical dis-ease, the flowers melting is, precisely, the fact of his being a lover试试看是否能使用这个成语“to make one thing out of another”:

\[\text{The lover's ambivalence about the coming separation from his mistress surfaces by way of displacement onto the friends, whose divided opinion is a keynote to the poem; some of them say the "breath goes now, and some say no": the small orthographic difference between now and no signals the poem's interest in subtle ambivalence, in words, moods, and feelings that look homogeneous but are not. That some voices say one thing and some another mind. Donne violently, as Dr. Johnson put it, would be as delicate as a woman who is about to have a baby.} \]
and some another precisely characterizes the speaker's own mind. Donne may have sometimes yoked heterogeneous matter violently, as Dr. Johnson's accusation goes, but his yoking could also be as delicate as the contrasting chimes of now and no, as the suggestive rhyming of opposite in goe and no.

Donne's delicacy is especially evident in the way he works negative words into his manifest protestation of love. (Let me again emphasize that the depth of his love is not in question, only its purity.) The concluding "no" of the first stanza is echoed in the second: "No," "No," "nor." Of course these negatives are meant to affirm the special quality of the voyager's love for his mistress, but the negation spreads outwards beyond his conscious control. A small part of this derives from the poet's having told us in A Valediction: on weeping that separation negates the entire relationship ("So thou and I are nothing then when on a diverse shore"). More generally, one wonders why the word "no" comes so often to the lips of a lover trying so ostentatiously to say, "Yes, I love you even though we're parting temporarily."

In any case, his ambivalence leads him, in this second stanza, to suppress tears ("No teare-floods, nor sigh-tempests") and, simultaneously, to advocate melting quietly apart, like tears running off in opposite directions (one meaning of to melt is, precisely, to shed tears, as in Shakespeare's Lucrece: "Each flower moistened like a melting eye"). Melt is a complex word, bringing a broad range of feeling to the poem, including the rather different possibilities that the lovers' union is, when unmelted, like ice, that separation is an opportunity for a softening compassion, as in Milton's "Look homeward angel now, and melt with ruth," that it is an opportunity for moral and physical dissolution: "Let Rome in Tiber melt"; "O that this too, too sullied flesh would melt." Because this ambivalence can be better defended when kept silent, overt expression of feeling is seen as profanation, nothing but "noise." Thus the speaker forbids mourning both for high and low reasons, both because he wants to protect his noble love from cheap self-advertisements and because he is actually glad to go.

*William Empson suggests that the speaker of "Forbidding Weeping" wishes, perhaps unconsciously, to get "rid of" his mistress; *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930; rpt, New York: New Directions, 1960), p. 140.
Of course there is another, far more usual, way of taking the second stanza. We can leach the conflict out of it by ignoring the fact that the poem opens with a prologue about death, doubt, denial, forbidding, noise, and profanation before coming to rest on what is obviously not a simple theme: "our love." Sanders is typical of readers who want to locate the poem's negative emotions outside the poem:

The 'Valediction' celebrates, with...poise, natural reticence, restraint, the courteous withholding of emotion...the argument of the poem is that there is a logic in the very nature of passion which exacts this restraint—not a restraint upon emotion, but a natural restraint arising from the emotion itself—a natural fear of what Donne calls, with great exactitude, 'prophanation': ...[this] gets beautifully the sense one has, about almost all public displays of emotion, that something is being cheapened.

But something is being cheapened or profaned or made ambivalent right here in the poem itself, despite efforts to make the poem a comment on other lovers' cheapness. The lover is not merely exhibiting a "courteous withholding of emotion." The speaker must be held responsible for raising the subject of profanation simply because it is not self-evident that public displays of emotion are profane: in "Valediction: on weeping a whole world of worth is coined out of public tears.

The speaker's ambivalence persists. Beginning with the souls of virtuous men and continuing throughout the poem, Donne's speaker sketches the whole range of the spiritual universe, from the heaven that virtue anticipates, to the earthly world of the laity, to the presumed hell that awaits profaners. Conventional wisdom claims that the speaker moves only in the direction of the heavenly, rising above the "Dull sublunary" world. But in fact, as we see in the third stanza, the man's mind is running on earthquakes, on "harmes and feares," and these are associated in the Renaissance with hell and damnation. When in Donne's day men reckoned what earthquakes "did and meant," they discovered, among other things, God's wrath, His omens of hell. Thus even the secular Gabriel Harvey, to whom we will later refer for a description of the...