

# [Donne’s "a valediction of weeping”](https://assignbuster.com/donnes-a-valediction-of-weeping/)

“ A Valediction of Weeping” embodies John Donne’s ability to unite form and content in the beauty and intricacy of his metaphysical conceits. By closely interpreting these conceits, or complex extended metaphors, the reader is able to appreciate and understand many underlying themes of sorrow and consolation within the lovers’ parting. The word “ valediction” means to bid farewell, whereas the word “ of” adds an ambiguity to the meaning of the title. While this could be literally translated as “ a tearful goodbye”, the “ of” also suggests that the lovers in this poem are attempting to bid farewell to the act of weeping. This lyrical poem serves as a passionate expression between lovers separating for a period of time as the nautical imagery suggests that the speaker is embarking on a voyage. Donne structures the farewell essentially by exploring the intensity of their relationship and the means in which the speaker attempts to comfort his lover. The multiple meanings behind his metaphors, use of spherical imagery, and varied versification all contribute to the overall complexity of the lovers’ farewell. The structure of complex extended metaphors Donne utilizes is reflective of the lyric itself. The content of the poem is demonstrated through many different spherical images. The word “ sphere” implies a type of heavenly perfection and clearly Donne has centered his metaphors on these spherical images in a way to idealize the relationship between these two lovers. The “ tears” as “ coins” immediately present their expressions of love as something meaningful on Earth, as they contain mintage. However, by using images that are spherical, Donne is implying that their love has a heavenly meaning as well. The word “ Pregnant” furthers the image of roundness and makes their multiplying tears seemingly positive as products of their deep affection for one another. The “ round ball” and “ globe” idealize how the lovers are each other’s worlds. This idea of spheres can be extended by understanding that they experience the circle of life—creation and destruction—within the worlds contained in their tears. This concept is furthered by the round imagery of the final stanza: the “ moon” and “ sphere”. Here the lovers are fulfilling the destructive aspect of the circle in that she may drown him by her influence—which is described as being more powerful than the moon on the tides—and that their sorrows may be the cause of their destruction. The idealization of their love is an attempt for the speaker to soothe his lover and end her weeping as they are preparing to separate. The lyric begins with the request that the speaker may “ pour forth” his feelings. The word pour implies his inclination to both express himself freely and allow himself to cry. His lover is also described as crying as her face “ coins” his tears. Just as a monetary coin bears the stamp of a face, so does her face reflect his tears. Here Donne introduces his first metaphysical conceit by comparing their tears to “ coins” and “ stamps”. His tears are meaningful only because they bear her “ stamp” and thus demonstrate her return of affection. Furthermore, her tears give his own a “ mintage” by giving his love and sorrow a worth. This demonstrates how the speaker is attempting to comfort his lover by giving her an exaggerated power. By suggesting that she has the ability to determine his worth, he is trying to console his lover in this time of parting. As they cry together and their tears mix, Donne makes a metaphorical connection between their tears and being “ pregnant”. He is demonstrating that just as pregnancy is a creation between two people, their tears are intermingling and bear the “ fruits” of their love. Not only are the tears products of their love, but are “ emblems” of their subsequent sadness at parting. As the tears fall from their eyes, unfortunately so will the two lovers into sorrow because the love that they share will be lost when they are apart on a “ divers shore”. The middle stanza continues Donne’s circular imagery suggesting a heavenly perfection. It begins with the central metaphor in reference to mapmakers creating a globe from a “ round ball”. Together, the two lovers are mapmakers in their own right as they can create their entire world within each tear. Just as a globe would be meaningless without countries, without each other, the lovers’ tears would be useless. Together they are “ all”. The worlds that they contain in their tears are everything to the speaker and when their tears mix, hers “ overflow” his world in sadness. This conceit marks another instance of Donne’s use of spherical imagery in the connection between the lover and her ability to both create and destroy. He reassures his love that she has given the speaker his “ heaven” and the effect of their separation will be great enough to dissolve it. After speaking about an Earthly globe, Donne enters into the final stanza in describing a lunar globe, offering another image of round perfection. He claims the lover to be “ more than moon”, implying that just as the moon has the power to draw the tides, so does she in drawing out the speaker’s own tears that will drown his world. Here, Donne makes a literal parallel between her ability to drown him in her tears and the sea’s ability to overtake his voyage ship. He pleads for her not to teach the sea her destructive ways and that he is able to escape harm from the natural elements on the journey he is about to take. This hyperbolic imagery serves as a way to soothe the lover from her weeping. As the speaker returns to the current scene between the two lovers crying he requests that they stop exhausting their emotions in tears. Here the speaker adds to the complexity of their farewell by giving his lover definitive control over his own life. The speaker implies that they are one as they “ sigh one another’s breath” and share the same life. As they exhaust their emotions by sighing, they are breathing out each other’s life. Her tears become almost cruel as she is killing him with her sadness. The longer they remain in this sorrowful weeping, the more they are emotionally hurting one another. It is important to recognize that the form of the poem represents the passion of the speaker. Each verse is drastically varied and thus implies a sort of dramatic vivacity. Donne often intermixes very short lines with much longer ones and this form gives a heightened feeling of emotion. This ebb and flow of feelings adds to the complexity as it parallels the realistic ambivalence the lovers feel towards their short period away from each other. Often it seems the shorter lines also serve as a passage from the introduction of the conceit to the actual conceptualization. In the first stanza, “ For thus they be / Pregnant of thee”, connects the metaphor of coining their tears to the tears being actual products of the lovers (l. 5-6). In the second stanza, “ So doth each tear, / Which thee doth wear”, carries the conceit of the lovers as mapmakers into their created worlds being contained within each tear (l. 14-15). The final stanza bears the lines “ Let not the wind / Example find”, to connect the lover’s ability to drown him both emotionally and physically with the speaker’s plea that they not destroy each other with their emotions (l. 23-24). Donne seems to use these shorter lines in a way to suspend the reader within his original idea, the actual feeling, and then flow into a conclusive meaning. “ A Valediction of Weeping” uses seemingly unrelated concepts metaphorically in its portrayal of two lovers sharing a sorrowful farewell. Much of John Donne’s poetry displays his mastery of metaphysical conceits in his attempts to express emotional meaning using very unusual metaphors. This particular lyrical poem, for instance, draws from areas of economy, cartography, and astronomy in the conceits that portray the passionate affection between the two lovers. He further utilizes round imagery in an attempt to conjure a heavenly perfection in the lovers’ relationship. In suggesting the perfect wholeness of their love, the speaker is attempting to comfort the lover and end her weeping. Consolation lies in the exaggerated power his metaphors have given her and the also in the poem itself. Simply by creating such a lasting work of art in tribute to their farewell, the lover may find reassurance of his affection and bring an end to her tears. “ A Valediction of Weeping” is a beautifully complex poem that utilizes metaphysical conceits, spherical imagery, and lively versification to demonstrate an intense expression of love and sorrow within a lovers’ goodbye.