CHAPTER-II
ERUDITE AND SECULAR IMAGERY

In the first of his satires Donne gives an account of his library:

Here are Gods conduits, grave Divines; and here
Natures Secretary, the Philosopher;
And jolly Statesmen, which teach now to tie
The sinewes of a cities mistique bodie;
Here gathering Chroniclers, and by then stand
Giddie fantastique Poets of each land.¹

This account of his library by Donne clearly reflects his taste for scholarship and his interest in various fields of knowledge. He assimilated every kind of knowledge and human experience he came across and transformed them into images. He had read the great scholastic writers, the great masters of pagan learning and ancient wisdom. Walton remarks that his "bed", even in the most unsettled days of his youth, "was not able to retain him beyond the hour of four in the morning and it was not common business that drew him out of the chamber till past ten. All which time was employed in study, though he took great liberty after it."²


Donne, who divided his time thus, can not but be taken seriously. Intellectual interests remained a vital part of his nature throughout his life and directly influenced his poetic style. He frequently refers, on the one hand, to war and military affairs, law, voyages, politics, business, the human body and many details of domestic life that establish a firm realism on material plane; and on the other hand, to scholastic doctrines, new learning, astronomy, alchemy, medicine, geometry and other learning that takes one to intellectual heights.

The element of erudition present in the poetry of Donne is the result of his wide readings. His own ambitions and aspiration for a top secular career, a burning desire to lead a distinguished life, his own intellectual problems, all combined to strengthen his thirst for knowledge. No doubt, the career he aspired for demanded knowledge, yet his quest for learning was a result of his curiosity which was a dominating trait of his mind, his thirst for knowledge seems to be the basic thirst for life. His search for reality is reflected in his poetry through images. His poetry compresses and epitomises his whole experience as a man whose intellectual curiosity is as great as his susceptibility to passionate feeling.
Donne's erudite imagery finds its sources both from the ancient and medieval learning as well as the learning of his day. Ancient philosophy, mythology and modern science interested him alike. The literature of renaissance reflects the influence of the scholastic philosophy and Greek learning on the one hand and the medieval learning and alchemical practices on the other. These were the topics of living interest for Donne.

He was deeply interested in the mythological stories from ancient Greece and Rome. He employs images from these fields to explore the complex nature of love. True and spiritual love is defined through the metaphor of Eagle and Dove as they are symbols of strength and gentleness respectively. But their love is so unique and complex and their union so perfect that it can find no better analogy than in the Phoenix myth:

The Phoenix ridle hath more wit
By us, we two being one, are it.
So to one neutral thing both sexes fit,
Wee dye and rise the same, and prove
Mysterious by this love. 3

The bird, self sufficient and self enclosed, represents unity and perfection in love. The efficacious application of the conceit makes it a part of the central metaphor of canonization. Marriage is the union of two souls and the

blissful nuptial atmosphere of Lady Elizabeth's marriage
day is best defined through the wedlock of two phoenixes,
that unite into one by the end of the epithalamion. Now,
"Thor's but one Phenix still, as was before". Phoenix is
one of the central images in Donne.

These myths supply hyperbolic metaphors to Donne.
In "Elegie VIII", where the poet follows the "Petrarchan
convention of hyperbolic praise", he finds the breasts of
the mistress "Like Proserpina's white beauty keeping
chest", or "Joves best fortunes urne". Jove's urns are
vessels of harmony and beauty and the "beauty keeping
chest" is the embodiment of beauty itself. Apart from
love, these myths also define other human feelings.
The ill feelings of mischief, sick mindedness and other vile
associations of envy get defined through Chymera, the fire
breathing monster; Tenarus, the poisonous tree begotten
from the spit of Cerberus, from Greek mythology; and
Oreus, the lower world of shadows and abortive shapes from
Roman mythology in "Elegie VIII". Another hyperbolic tool
becomes "Lethe", the river of Hades that makes the souls

4. "An Epithalamion, Or marriage Song on the Lady
Elizabeth and Count Palatine being married on St.
Valentine's day", Poetical Works, p.116.

5. Helen Gardner, ed. John Donne: Elegies and Songs

forget all about their previous life, the death of Elizabeth Drury has caused "Lethe flood,/ Hath drown'd us all". The poet also refers to Morpheus, Pluto, Cupid, Bores and other Greek mythological figures.

Medieval beliefs and practices recur frequently in Donne and serve as a tool to substantiate and illustrate the speaker's point of view in a poem. He refers to the medieval belief that the forked root of the mandrake plant could beget a child. But the image implies a sense of impossibility. The plant evokes a sense of sorrow, anguish and agony. The poet says challengingly, "Get with child a mandrake roote". Donne's fascination for the belief was so irresistible that he employed the mandrake image quite often. The plant, with its roots in human shape was supposed to produce sorrowful sounds, thus, could represent a dejected lover: "Make me a mandrake, so I may groane here". Of all Donne's mandrake figures, the best occurs in "The Progresse of the soule". It is unique for its human touch, enlivening minute description and juxtaposition of thought and sensation. Mandrake, sacred to a "lustfull woman" for its traditional erotic associations as stimulant of lust, a love potion, grows in

a "dark and foggy Plot" as the second station of the soul in its progress from one life to the other. The anatomy of the plant receives very minute and detailed description with enlivening human touch:

And to his shoulders dangle subtile haires;  
A young Colossus there hee stands upright,  
And as that ground by him were conquered,  
A leafie garland weares he on his head  
Enchas'd with little fruits, so red and bright  
That for them you would your Loves lips white;  

Images from other popular beliefs and superstitions also have been effectively used by Donne. He has entitled one of his poems "Witchcraft by a picture". In the epithalamion on the marriage of lady Elizabeth, the poet exploits the popular belief that birds choose their mates on St. Valentine's day. The metaphor runs throughout the poem and plays a key role in the development of the theme. Starting from the ordinary "chirping Choristers" the poem ends in the unique perfection of "Phenix".

Aristotalian and scholastic metaphysics also provide many images to Donne. The Aristotalian doctrine of three souls viz. the vegetable, the sensible and the rational, has frequent occurrence. The rational soul comes after the vegetable and the sensible, which are inherent

11. "An Epithalamion, Or marriage Song on the Lady Elizabeth, and Count Palatine being married on St. Valentines day", Ibid., pp. 113 ff.
but its very rare like the appearance of a new star in the firmament.

The Elizabethans believed in the AristoItalian and Ptolemaic system of astronomy. They were skeptical towards the new theories of Copernicus, who altered the traditional theory of the sun's movement round the earth: Kepler, who identified two new stars; Braha; and Galileo, who with his telescope, brought forward a revolutionized map of heavens and in 1610 announced the discovery of innumerable new stars and four satellites of Jupiter. Donne, like other Elizabethans, shared the opinion of Ptolemy and Aquinas. The new philosophy had created a conflict between faith and doubt. Donne doubted the finding of Copernicus:

And were the doctrines new
That the earth mov'd, this day would make it true.\(^{16}\)

But it is not so. Rather it is "Sunne" that "doth in his largest circle runne". The new philosophy "arrests the Sunne;/ And bids the passive earth about it runne".\(^{17}\) Donne is skeptical about the new philosophy and at times the claims of these enthusiastic astronomers bring about a state of indecisiveness:

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16. "Ecclogve. 1613. December 26", Poetical Works, p.120.
17. "To the Countesse of Bedford. T'have written then", Ibid., p. 173.
And new Philosophy calls all in doubt,
The Element of fire is quite out
The Sun is lost, and th'earth and no man say it:
Can well direct him where to look for it.

The "new compasse" which worked by "Magnetique force" was one of the three inventions that were generally thought to be the "only sound contributions" of man to the field of knowledge, the other two being printing press and gun powder. However, at times there seems to be a partial acceptance of the new reason based philosophy. Primrose flowers remind Donne of the view of the milky way of stars as seen through Galileo's telescope. He is quite excited by the new discoveries, as his recurrent images on them reveal; however, the excitement is overpowered by the medieval belief of the general decay and corruption:

   And freely men confess that this world's spent,
   When in the Planets, and the Firmament,
   They seeke so many new:

A sense of mystery, wonder and superhumaness is evoked by the idea of a new star. The beloved is like a new star to be seen with wonder and excitement through the telescope. The beloved is asked, "Bee thou a new starre, that to us pretends/ Ends of much wonder".  

19. Ibid., p.214.
many beautiful images. They are scattered in such an orderly way in the sky like "beads/ Strung in one string". They are symbols of true love.

The other astronomical images are: sphere, galaxy, constellation, zone, meteor, moon, sun etc. Homogeneity, whiteness and numerousness is suggested by the galaxy. The "Forme" and "infinite" of the Primrose flower "Make a terrestrial Glaxie". Sphere represents spiritual and true love, whereas earth symbolises physical love that is subject to death and decay, and brings harms and fears. In another poem the bridegroom passes from person to person in the marriage party as an angelic being does pass through spheres in the sky. Beneath the sphere of moon is the reign of death and decay. Moon brings disturbances of the air, floods, earthquakes etc. It causes tides resulting in "teare-floods" that will drown the lover and his world. Moon, for Donne, represents lust resulting in corruption, death and decay. "Dull Suhlunary lovers" are under the influence of moon whereas spiritual love is under the influence of incorruptible heavens.

Moon does not bring the traditional image of beauty to Donne. However, the paradoxical presentation of "shee" sun and "hee" moon runs very effectively and skillfully in two of his epithalamic verses. This equation represents
perfect union in love when the sense of individuality completely disappears, lover and beloved exchanging their natures become one.

Images of the sun, the "eye of heaven" often serve as an effective tool in his poems. The sun is source of light and illumination where true love grows, shadows bring doubt and faithlessness. It imparts life, vigour, love and enlightenment and is the symbol of perfect beauty as well as virtues — a unique combination for Donne. Only beloved or the king can reach the height of the sun. Thus a king is like the "Sun" and his ambassador his "Torch" or "Taper" as he owes a "faire beam" to the king and carries to "another sphere his vertue streame". 21 The sun represents beauty beyond description, it is "Heavens Liberall". The very presence of the beloved can convert the dark, rough and cold climate of northern regions into a "Paradise" as she is a "beauteous Sun". Donne's images of the sun are at times highly imaginative and enlivening. So the "Sun-beames" are its "naiere" which it spreads over the world as "flame" while "sitting in the chair of light". 22 However, these images are used by Donne as tools of expressing complex meanings. If the analogies sometimes

are to glorify the object in hand, in some poems, even the sun, very source of such comparisons, appears irrelevant "Busie old foole".23

Astronomical images also come from meteors. They have an implication of self destruction and death. They are confused interwinding of stuff and form. When in a state of confusion, the poet finds himself "Meteor-like, of stuffe and form perflext". Eclipses represent separation and gloom caused thereby but it can't bring down the position of the sun or the moon, its effect is short lived. So body, with its sin and corruption, can not eclipse soul for ever:

As dead low earth ecclipses and controules
The quick high Moone: so doth the body, Soules.24

Thus, Donne's astronomical images, apart from reflecting his keen interest in astronomy (though he does never attempt to settle the controversies) serve as effective tools of illustrating and substantiating the themes of the poems and the speaker's point of view. His interest in astronomy was unquestionably deep, no doubt. Yet, it could not satisfy his search for a substantial reality, and merely serves as a tool to cater his poetic demands. The

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24. "To the Countesse of Bedford. T'have written then", Poetical Works, p. 173.
reasons are clear enough. Donne's own bent of mind did not allow any breach in the settled and accepted beliefs in astronomy but led his skepticism towards the new, reason based theories. Though the soundness of the reason of the new theory was gradually limiting the old system, yet all the same, it did not appear so sound and fool-proof to an Elizabethan mind as to satisfy the "colossus mentality" of Donne, who was looking for a reality beyond the limits of doubts and questions.

Like medieval astronomy, medieval chemistry too was of living interest for Donne. "Limbecke", the alchemist's pot, containing mysterious things within its round shape, was mysterious like the universe itself. In alchemy all matter is permeated with spirit and thus transmutable. An alchemist was always busy in melting, rarefying, extracting quintessence in his alembic. With the "Subtile fire" he claimed to extract from baser metals their "Soule"- gold. This process had to pass through the stages of melting and evaporation. The process of melting is also akin to the medieval idea of the melting of this world. As in alchemy "melting" is necessary for the process of purification, so in love hands must be "firmly cimented" and souls must "mixe" to attain "abler soules", free from "drosse", or "allay":

But as all severall soules containe
Mixture of things, they know not what,
Love, these mixt soules doth mixe againe
And makes both one, each this and that. 26

Such lovers are not affected by bodily separation:

So let us melt, and make no noise,
No teare-floods, nor sigh-tempests move. 27

Melting results in evaporation. The image occurs frequently in Donne. In "A feaver", the beloved "vapours" the whole world with her breath in "burning fitts" of fever. The images related to this process which occur frequently are "furnace", "fit fuel", "fire", "glorious flame", "concoction", "tincture", "electrum", "quintessence" etc. The alchemical theory of transmutation of baser metals into gold is applicable to souls also. The grave of a virtuous person is like a "limbecke" - a refining vessel, and the dead body is transmuted into a quintessential substance to be used by God for purification of all earthly flesh on the day of judgement. Virtues have such "Elixaerlike" qualities that they can transform ordinary women into a deity. Alchemy, thus, evokes the sense of purification and virtues. It is akin to religion in its mysterious nature. Souls can be purified by alchemy and great souls can purify the world

27. "A Valediction: forbidding mourning", Ibid., p.44.
"by a true religious Alchymie". Alchemy can purify even the "drossie Rhymes" and "change them to gold".

However, the emphasis on transmutability resulting in "Elixir", "tincture" and "concoction" does not rule out the value of baser metals. It is from them that quintessence is to be extracted. In order to emphasise the worth of men from humble background, the poet exploits Paracelsian belief that gold would increase in weight if buried and constantly fertilized with fresh human urine and animal dung:

For when from herbs the pure part must be wonne From gresse, by Stilling, this is better done By despis'd dung, then by the fire or Sunne.

Paracelsus compared the heat required for the alchemical process with the heat inside a womb. Moreover, the roundness of shape and mysterious nature of the alchemist's "limbecke" brings it close to pregnancy and a womb in Donne's imagination. The mysterious nature of woman's genital parts that can not be described through ordinary language find alchemical metaphor. The "best lov'd part" of the mistress holds "cherishing" heat like "Chymicks masculine equall fire" heating up the "Lymebecks warme wombe" and can inspire "Into th'earth's worthlesse

durt a soule of gold". The best analogy between a womb and alchemy comes in "The Progress of the Soule" where the poet very efficaciously exploits the alchemical metaphor to define the process of embryo formation:

Like Chimiques equall fires, her temperate wombe Had stew'd and form'd it: and part did become A spungie liver, that did richly allow, Like a free conduit, on a high hills brow, Life-keeping moisture unto every part: Part hardened it selfe to a thicker heart, Whose busie furnaces lifes spirits do impart.

Donne's fascination for alchemy does not make him blind to its limitations. He is aware of the hollowness of the extravagant claims of these medieval chemists. Thus, any attempt to know the mystery of love is an alchemist's day dreaming. Alchemy is used, at times, as a derogatory term - as something corrupt and worldly. Though for alchemists, "All wealth" is "alchimie", yet most often their failure to make gold legitimately results in their antithetical practices of forging money, and such "Alchimists doe coyners prove".

By Donne's time, physics was not developed as a branch of learning. Naturally, images from physics are very rare. But they are very significant. The two dominant images from physics are of magnifying glass and magnet. "Christall glasse", for Donne is a means for the pursuit

32. "Elegie VIII. The Comparison", Poetical Works, p.82.
of knowledge. It brings the sense of centralisation of all knowledge and maximum utilisation of one's capacities. It is the power of discretion which he finds equal to magnifying glass. It also symbolises purity and virtues as no "poison can harm a "christall glasse".

Images of magnet occur in his religious poetry. Magnet had a deep significance for him. Perhaps it was a "Loadstone" that he was trying to search through all his eulogistic poems so that his bloaked career could be drawn towards success and his ambitions are fulfilled. Failing in his efforts, ultimately, he searched the path of religion and a passionate appeal to God: "thou like Adamant draw mine iron heart". Only then he can hope of salvation.

As in alchemy, in medical science also Donne shows the influence of Paracelsus. His acquaintance with him, as already seen in his alchemical imagery, deepened his interest in human body. But he was fascinated by the structure and functioning of body, its health and ailments right from his early days. Apart from his own ill health which intensified his physiological interests, he was drawn towards medicine under influence of his stepfather.

John Syminges, a doctor and President of the Royal College of Physicians. He knew the theories of Galan also and exploited them as images. Galan said that all the four elements forming body, i.e., air, water, fire and earth, should be equally balanced. Excess of any of these vital elements was as harmful as their deficiency, because if they "abundant grow, and burdenous, / And nourish not, but smother".  

37 The metaphor can illustrate different conditions, sighs, tears, passion and despair of a lover:

My fire of Passion, sighes of ayre,  
Water of teares, and earthly sad despair,  
Which my materialls bee,  
But neere beware out by loves securitie.

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The sufferings and diseases of this world can be cured, in keeping with the Paracelsian belief, by simple touch of some herbs and roots as they have the influence of stars:

So as the influence of those starres may bee  
Imprison'd in an Hearbe, or Charme, or Tree,  
And doe by touch, all which those stars could doe?

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In Paracelsian medicine and alchemy all organic bodies have an "intrinsique balme", which is the preservative essence necessary to keep them steady. This "balme" is the life vigour and "tincture" of all creatures, its loss causes diseases and death. The poet tells the countess of

38. Idem.
Bedford that her high birth and beauty are like "Balsamum":

In every thing there naturally growes
A balsamum to keep it fresh, and new,
If 'twere not injur'd by extrinsique blowes;

Thus, rain is the "balmy showre" which ensures life on this earth. Similarly, perfection in virtues has balmy effect in protection of this world from fall of virtues and general decay and death. The life balm of this world being impaired by the Fall, Elizabeth Drury, the embodiment of virtues, can cure the world with her "Lampe of Balsamum". It is this "Balme" which Donne seems to look for in religion and divinity to ensure knowledge of the ultimate truth.

Donne's poetry is teeming in the images from medical science and largest among them are the images of disease and death. Such images shall find full treatment in the next chapter. In addition to disease and death, there are the images of wounds. A wound reminds the poet of the corruptible nature of man which like a "Consuming wound" is decaying this world. In order to save the soul from this consumption, one has to apply the "methridate" - antidote - of "learning", "virtues" and "religion".  

41. Ibid., p. 168.
have a "mystique language" and by "the eyes water" we can differentiate between true love and wayward infatuation. Tears are analogous to sea as they cause "floods" and "drowne" the world of lovers.

The anatomical images with their vividness, minuteness of description, efficaciousness and imaginative appeal contribute significantly to the complex meanings in Donne's poetry. The poet finds the functioning of human body like that of a clock whose wheel can feel every disorder or loss of equilibrium. In case of any inner disorder, the "pulse" either "beates not, or beats unevenly", as is the case with the hands of a clock. The "sinews" in human body are akin to the strings of a clock, and the "Soule" is like "the spring". Human voice is "the Bell" which echoes the inner heart of man. 42

Donne frequently uses the word "anatomie" which shows his interest in the human body. A body must be "cut up" and "torne" without any "torture", because "Rack't carcasses make ill Anatomies". 43 This clinical metaphor has been used by Donne quite frequently to explain the nature of true love. The friends of the lover, after his

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42 "Obsequies to the Lord Harrington, brother to the Lady Lucy, Countesse of Bedford", Poetical Works, pp. 250 f.
43 "Loves exchange", Ibid., p.32
death, "cut up" his body and find a picture of the beloved in his heart.

Anatomical imagery shows a juxtaposition of microcosm and macrocosm also. The human soul is like a string that weaves together heaven and earth like weaving together of a bone in a body by pith:

As doth the pith, which, lest our bodies slacke, Strings fast the little bones of necke, and backe: So by the Soule doth death string Heaven and Earth; 44

A large number of anatomical images are related to womb. It has already been mentioned how Donne was influenced by Paracelsus who talked frequently about the alchemical practices in relation to womb. The other possible reason for his fondness of womb images seems to be the birth of twelve children in his seventeen years of married life. It has a deeper significance also. For its fertility and richness a womb is a "gold mine", whereas for its hidden mysteries it is analogous to stars: the eyes of the bride are "wombe of stortres". This sense of mystery and curiosity regarding the functioning of human body widens his sensibility. The "vast wombe" of the whale appears to him to be an "Inland sea" that is meant

to "joyne our seas, with seas above the firmament". 45 Thus wombe for Donne transcends the narrow limits of an organ with the alchemical associations of Paracelsus, and even the "Limbecke". The womb of Virgin Mary is "Welbelov'd imprisonment" as it has "Immensity cloysterd" 46 in it. Thus, womb becomes symbol of perfection - a means of searching truth from the human to divine.

It can be further explained through his images of pregnancy. Tears - for their conversion into a whole world by appearance of the image of the beloved on them, and for their round shape - evoke the mental picture of pregnancy. The image is visual as well. Pregnancy is "Swel'd" like a pillow in the bed and a bulging "banke". In the poem "The Flea", admired for its "sheer wit" as it performs "a kind of miracle" and succeeds "in triumphing over the laws of nature", 47 the flea that has sucked the blood of both the lover and the beloved becomes a symbol of their union. The flea thus, swelled and "pampr'd" like pregnancy, becomes symbol of creation. Briefly, if pregnancy is akin to a tear (which becomes perfection by the map of the beloved on it) for its round shape, it is also like a circle, which again, is the symbol of

perfection for Donne. Since womb conceives pregnancy, it becomes symbol of perfection and creation. Thus, the death of Elizabeth Drury, presented as an embodiment of perfect beauty and virtue, causes "false-conceptions fill the generall wombes". 48

Despite his fascination for medicine and physiology, Donne was aware of the limitations of doctors. There were many controversies regarding the body and its functioning. Donne's interest in medicine, on the whole, is not like that of a medical student. No doubt, he read and knew about the science of medicine and very effectively exploited it for the poetic purposes enriching it with the spice of his imagination. Even the limitations of medical science of the age supplied him with functional and opposite images. Thus, emphasizing the limitations of human knowledge on this decaying earth, he employs the controversy regarding the flow of blood from one ventricle to the other to achieve a certain effect in one of his poems:

Know'st thou how blood, which to the heart doth flow,
Both from one ventricle to th'other goe? 49

He refers to the contention regarding life and sensation of "Nailes and Haires" - the condition between life and

lifelessness - which fell beyond the purview of medieval medical science in "The Second Anniversarie".

His architectural images reveal Donne's interest in human body. He conceives of human body as a house with "the Muscles, Sinew and Veine", as its "tile" and "bones" as its "refters". His body without his beloved is a "scattered house", as he tells her in "A Valediction: of my name, in the window", that his return to her will "repair" and "recompact" his body. The immortalizing power of poetry is expressed through metaphors like "build", "sonnets", "rooms" etc.:

We'll build in Sonnets pretty rooms;
As well a well wrought urne becomes
The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombes,

Donne's view of animal anatomy also reflects his architectural taste. In his survey of an elephant's body he relates the organic network of bones and sinews, flesh and blood to architecture. The various parts of the body are like rooms in a vast house - rather a whole town - joined together with the "life cords" of sinewly threads. Here he mixes the spice of fiction with the factual details as he holds the view that a mouse can cause the death of an elephant by creeping up into its head through the trunk and gnaw its brain:

51. The word "sonnet" means a room in Italian.
In which as in a gallery this mouse
Walk'd, and surveid the roomes of his vast house,
And to the braine, the soules bedchamber, went,
And gnaw'd the life cords there.\textsuperscript{53}

The image is an enlivening example of the union of fact and fancy.

At times, Donne weaves together images from different fields to define a particular situation or an object and the result is kaleidoscopic. Inanimate and animate are so inextricably fused into one that a sense of cosmic unity is experienced. Donne's whale in "The Progressse of the Soule" achieves this state. The whale, for its spaciousness like that of a floating palace, is a "living boate". Combined with the strength and force of "canons", it has toughness of steel as its "ribs are pillars". The whale, thus, combines architecture and artillery in addition to the qualities that it inherits from the sea through its "gulfe-like throat".

Donne's fondness for architectural images lies in his desire to build an ideal world - "build in sonnets pretty roomes". It is the desire to achieve what he could not attain in this world despite his persistent efforts.

\textsuperscript{53} "The Progressse of the Soule", \textit{Poetical Works}, p. 283.
well as human body and human surroundings shows the impact of renaissance. His was the age of successful voyages and discoveries. Naturally, curiosity coupled with hopes for profitable business prospects enhanced the interest of even scholars in geography and voyages. If astronomy, within its own limitation, was to satisfy his hunger for the knowledge of the cosmos, geography helped him to explore the reality of this world around him. It was mainly through the experiences of the navigators and sailors that people knew about the strange and undiscovered lands in those days. Descriptions of such adventurous, wonderful and profitable voyages captured the imagination of Donne and provide a substantial range of images in both secular as well as religious poems.

The way he works out a geographical conceit in his poem "A Valediction: of the booke", bears a testimony to his knowledge of the subject. He could determine the latitudes and longitudes. He talks of measuring the heights of his love and depths of sorrow during his separation from his beloved:

......abroad I'll studie thee,
As he removes farre off, that great heights takes;
How great love is, presence best tryall makes,
But absence tryes how long this love will bee;
To take a latitude
Sun, or starre, are fitliest view'd
At their brightest, but to conclude
Of longitudes, what other way have wee,  
But to marke when, and where the darke eclipses bee?  

Geographical metaphors can satisfy Donne's fondness of fusing macrocosm and microcosm. The span of life can be measured by the circles imagined by geographers parallel to equator i.e. latitudes. The full length of life is thus represented by equator, whereas at poles it is the shortest. This apposite concept is followed by a series of images from climatic zones representing various aspects of human life. The heated atmosphere and maddening chase for rank and prosperity in courts is represented by "Torried Zone", feverish ambitions by "Calentures" - the self-destructive delirium of tropical fever; and the atheists are cold in religious matters like "ice". The progression of imagery as seen above can be traced throughout the poem "Obsequies to the Lord Harrington" as the poem marks a logical development of imagery.

The frequent fusion of microcosm and macrocosm shows the immensity of Donne's imagination. The various phenomena of the working of nature arrested his imagination. Positioned up above in the space he can survey these phenomena with minute observation andimaginative outlook. He measures the mountains and oceans,
plains and rocks with equal curiosity. Here is a highly imaginative view of the Mt. Teneriff, which, with its high projecting rocks, may shipwreck the moon that floats in the sky as a ship does in sea:

Doth not a Tenarif, or higher Hill
Rise so high like a Rocke, that one might thinke
The floating Moone would shipwrecke there, and Sinke?55

A woman's body may also be defined in geographical terms. Thus, "Forest" stands for her hair, "Meridian" (east and west) for nose and its two holes, "rosie Hemisphere" for cheeks, "Promontory" for chin, and "Hellespont" for valley between breasts. Some geographical metaphors achieve symbolic meaning viz. north stands for coldness, lack of vigour and frozen life whereas west stands for darkness and end of life. Thus Northern sea is thrice "Colder than Salamanders". Equator — "even line" — is a "furnace" and poles are "icy". Rocks evoke the picture of firmness of character and immunity to death and destruction.

The precious minerals are not formed in an easy way; the process is long and painstaking. Some powerful force is required to "melt" the poles and busy cities and forests, mountains and plains into the bosom of the earth before they are converted into precious minerals.

On a round ball
A workman that hath copies by, can lay
An Europe, Afrique, and an Asia,
And quickly make that, which was nothing, All, 57

The image of the beloved adds the global meaning to a rounded drop of tear. Even in a serene and mystical mood of total identification with God, the soul of the poet views from above, his body being examined by physicians like "Cosmographers" who diagnose a "South-west discovery" of the body i.e. death:

Whilst my Physitians by their love are growne
Cosmographers, and I their Mapp, who lie
Flat on this bed, that by them may be showne
That this is my South-West discoverie 58

So, "Mapp" comes close to the idea of communion with God. But the "Mapp" itself can not have that bliss of communion, it is only for the soul to experience it. Moreover, the map is not reality in itself, but merely a shadow of it and the shadows represent, for Donne, fall of virtues and decay:

We're scarce our Fathers shadows cast at noone:
Onely death addes t'our length: 59

Then, how can his search for reality end in geography or map?

Donne enjoyed referring to various countries as images and not as simple geographical or political entities. Certain topical and historical references along with fanciful stories related by the navigators and merchants attributed many of these countries with such qualities that they attained almost symbolic significance in Donne's imagination. The largest in number are the images of India. The "rich Indian ware", for Donne, not only represent material opulence but also call for aesthetic pleasures. So the bride should be "as rich as Inde". India is the source of priceless benefit - both material and spiritual - hence the rhetorical question: "Is not Almighty Vertue'an India?"  

He tells his friend Tilman that his religious and theological career was like collecting "rich Indian ware". Thus, with its riches and opulence, material as well as theological and spiritual, India evokes a sense of surprise and wonder as it is a land of knowledge and invites exploration:

O Thou which to search out the secret parts
Of the India, or rather Paradise
Of knowledge, hast with courage and advise
Lately launch'd into the vast Sea of Arts,

Donne often confuses India with the "India's of spice and Myne". This inaccuracy of description is, however, because

60. "To Mr.R.W. If as mine is", Poetical Works, p.186.
61. "To Mr.S.B. O thou which", Ibid., p.186.
he did not have first hand knowledge of the countries that he refers to in his poems. Such images have more of a poetic appeal than factual representation.

Images of France are also very frequent as, for Donne, it was a country of religious "mis-devotion", lustful love, sexual disease, fashion, neatness, changeability and lightness. He often talks repulsively about the French "disease". His antipathy for this country, in general, seems to result from France's animosity with England which he hints at in "Elegie IX. Loves Warre" and in the following lines:

Men of France, changeable Camelions, Spittles of diseases, shops of fashions, Loves fuellers, and the rightest company Of Players,...... 62

French currency, akin to French disease, is "Pals", "lame", "leane" and "ruinous". Similarly "Spanish Stamps" - Spanish currency and gold - carry with them the undertones of seduction, corruption, intrigue, bribery and havoc for the adjoining countries. Such images have topical and historical significance too. The dominant images relating to some other countries are : "lust and hideous rage" of an Italian, a crafty and corrupt "Old Italian"; "mutinous Dutch", Spungy hydropitque Dutch"; Irish "sickness" and "feaver" of their revolt against Britain from 1594-96;

"Belgaias Cities" where "Gurty foulnesse guards"; German "Schisms"; "Afrique Monsters" etc. These images confirm Donne's dislike for these countries due to one or another reason. Apart from what others had told him about these countries, his own patriotism dominates as "England is onely a worthy Gallerie". These countries failed to associate with them the extraordinary status, like that of India, that the imagination of Donne demanded.

However, Rome remained a centre of religion for him and America evokes a sense of wonderful and profitable discovery of a precious belonging:

O my America! my new-found-land,
My kingdome, safest when with one man man'd,
My Myne of precious stones, My Emperie.

So far as the images of river are concerned the most frequent is that of Nile which has association with Pliny's belief that sun generated living creatures from the mud of the Nile. It represents the traditional quality of fertility. Other rivers mentioned in his poetry are Thames, Danube, Po, Tagus, Seine, etc. For Donne, a river brings the mental picture of trechery, flirtation, infidility and inconstancy. Water, whether in river or sea, conjures the image of corruption, drowning and death. The water of a

63. "Elegie XVI. On his Mistris", Poetical Works, p.100.
river not only "drownes" her "meads" but also the "corne o'rfow".

Apart from his continental trips as a grown up man, Donne as a young man had been twice with naval expeditions to Cadiz and Azores. His personal experiences with sea were too bitter to be forgotten: they left indelible imprints of sickness, death and drowning on his memory and provided him with a fairly large number of effective images to define the element of death and decay that he found to be the ultimate reality of this physical world. Though such images shall be discussed at length in the next chapter, they can be briefly dealt with here as well.

Starting with voyages, Donne has translated his voyage experience through two full length poems viz. "The Storme" and "The Calme". In his verse letter "To Sr Henry Wotton. Sir, more than kisses", the poet takes up the metaphor of voyage and develops it into a conceit which runs almost throughout the poem. The conceit is supported by a series of associated images that relate to life as a voyage. Donne's personal experiences made him acquainted with the hardships and struggle against wind and tempests, fear from underwater animals and rocks, sickness, starvation, storms and drowning. These experiences are analogous to our actual life on earth. Thus,"in the worlds sea":
Life is a voyage, and in our lifes wayes
Countries, Courts, Towns are Rocks, or Remoraes;
They breake or stop all ships.\textsuperscript{65}

Sea, as it is "glassie deep", is far from "hiding her guests" and the guests are soon devoured. Even beautiful women that can "melt" the poles, are helpless before its "Rage". Voyages involved sea-sickness, apart from the profitable business prospects and thrilling discoveries, so how ironical it is that one goes "To sea for nothing but to make him sick".\textsuperscript{66} On Donne, the negative aspect of voyages and seas is so dominant that it almost overpowers their utilitarian values. For instance, the corrupt law officers that exploit the law suitors are the "vast revishing seas".

Nevertheless, some good qualities may also be attributed to sea. If the limitless vastness of the sea brings the images of "Vast Sea of Arts" or "Worlds Sea", its moral virtues may also be apparently felt as in the following lines:

And in the worlds sea, do not like corke sleepe
Upon the waters face; nor in the deepe
Sinke Like a lead without a line.\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{65} "To Sr Henry Wotton. Sir, more than kisses", Poetical Works, p.160.
\textsuperscript{66} "Elegie XVIII. Loves Progress", Ibid., p.103.
\textsuperscript{67} "To Sr Henry Wotton. Sir, more than kisses", Ibid., p.161.
To undertake a voyage it is essential to learn about boats and harbours. Donne conjures up metaphor of boat to describe the beloved. A woman may entertain more than one man like a boat and search "new lands". But the lover is firm like a harbour. Harbour, thus, represents constancy and sincerity - free from fickleness of mind. Ships, like women may be of different nature and variety. Ravishing beauty of a woman can be represented by a ship. "Love's pinnace" is not to be "overfraught" with anything except love itself. It is this sense of tenderness for women that makes Donne write: "Who e'r rigg'd faire ship to lie in harbours".68

Ships, like sea, remind Donne of death. They are "Wooden Sepulchers". They share the characteristics of a prison too. Donne had both the experiences. The extreme hardship, sickness, fear and isolation are to be found in both journeys and prison, both are "Cloyster" and "Swaggering hell". It is in rare cases that Donne associates good qualities with ships. In one poem he compares ships to angels because they carry messages like angels who are conveyers of gospels, but all the same he warns that ships convey threatenings too:

Ships wing'd Angels be,
The which both Gospell, and sterne threatnings bring;

To sum up; the image of voyage is significant as life itself is a voyage for Donne. In this voyage sea and ship may be the agents of death and decay.

It was in November, 1611, when Donne left for France with Drury family, that he is said to have written "A Validiction: forbidding mourning" to advise his wife not to mourn at the time of his departure as their love was refined. The poem is remarkable, apart from its other qualities, for the famous compass conceit. He borrows the idea of compass image from others but transforms it into a unique animated artifact. Thus the simple idea, that true lovers are united even when they are physically separated like two feet of a compass, has been worked out so beautifully and convincingly that the lovers and the compass become one:

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

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69. "To Mr R.W. If, as mine is", Poetical Works, p.185.
Associated with compass are the images of circle. A circle has great significance for Donne. The growth of love can be represented through the formation of circle after circle in water, when stirred. They all, though separate from each other, move round one centre, i.e. the beloved, as "they are all concentrique unto" her. The idea of unity through a compass rests in the circle. A circle in Donne is symbol of eternity and perfection, "As perfect motions are all circular". A circle is "cornerlesse and infinite" like God himself. Thus soul which originally belongs to the heaven is also like a circle. The larger the circle, the greater its ability to contain. Now "great circles" are like soul as they can encompass the entire area between heaven and earth. In "Obsequies to the Lord Harrington", the poet tells that the compass of soul with its fixed foot in heaven encircles the entire world with its moving foot. After death, the moving foot of the soul restores its original place in heaven. So, the compass and circle are the means by which the poet can survey both earth and heaven and march ahead in his search for reality.

The emphasis on his search for reality should not, however, mean that Donne was an unworldly hermit who had renounced all aspirations for worldly advancements. On the
contrary, he was highly ambitious and it is this worldliness which, for one or the other reason, paved the way for his spiritual attainments, religious inclinations, which were inherent in him right from early days. His poetry is packed with images that echo and re-echo his ambitions. Though his inherent religious pursuit overpowers his earlier worldliness, it leaves its shadows in the form of images.

Right from the earliest days of monarchy, kings and courts have been held in high regard and considered institutions of great interest because royal favour brings political and material advancement. Donne, an ambitious renaissance scholar, strived for a political career. His naval expeditions to Cadiz and Azores brought him initial success in form of Sir Thomas Edgerton's secretaryship in 1598 and election as M.P. from Brackley in October 1601. But, his clandestine marriage with Ann More in December 1601 altered the course of his life, though, he cherished the hopes till 1615 when the king finally sealed his career in the Church. His esteem for the king and courts, naturally, beget numerous images which are scattered in his poems. Failure in getting political and material advancement resulted in the creation of a new world where there is a contempt for the worldly men who are asked, in "The Canonization", to satisfy themselves with "the Kings reall, or his stamped face".
However, this contempt is short lived, because the poet treated royalty to be supreme power of this physical world. King is like the "Sun" and his ambassador like a "Torch", through whom he spreads his light even in the foreign countries. Since kings are the agents of God, they should not be blamed for the royal orders of execution or massacre, they are simply "hangmen to Fate". Thus a king is flawless. Donne's fascination for royalty is so high that he takes it to heaven and shows a virtuous soul acting like a sovereign, dispensing various duties and enjoying the privileges:

She's, who being to her selfe a State, injoy'd
All royalties which any State employ'd; 73

The unquestioned and all pervasive supremacy of a king is akin only to perfect love as the lovers are "Prince enough" for each other. A lover is a king and, thus, the final authority in their love. But he has no existence without his beloved who is the state:

She's all States, and all Princes, I,
Nothing else is; 74

The complex relationship between body and soul can similarly be explained through the metaphor of king. Soul is like a queen and the body like her palace - "Standing house". On death, the queen vacates this palace and goes back to heaven:

When that Queene ended here her progress time,
And, as t'her standing house to heaven did climbe,

The metaphor can also present a vivid description of body soul relationship in connection with love. True love must come from soul and be expressed through body as orders come from the king and are implemented by the court. If otherwise, the soul will be lying in the body like "a great Prince in prison". A prince while on foreign tour, rules through his messangers, and if his kingdom is vast, he employs his agents, he sends to that foreign countries his ambassadors. Soul also, even after leaving body, employs "a subtile wreath of haire" to keep the body intact:

Viceroy to that, which then to heaven being gone,
Will leave this to controule,
And keeps these limbes, her Provinces, from dissolution.

This "Viceroy" is the "outward Soule" of the speaker, an agent of his soul. The images of ambassador also find frequent occurrence in his poetry. Glamour, social distinction and political eminence are attached to the post. Donne himself was very desirous to become an ambassador but in vain. However, the realization of the reality of this world and his greater achievement as an ambassador to God results in the following image:

What function is so noble, as to bee
Embassadour to God and destinie?
To open life, to give kingdomes to more
Than Kings give dignities; to keepe heavens doore?

Thus, a priest is an ambassador to God. Similarly, Donne conceives of God as a king, and soul as His subject and reason works as a "viceroys" to ensure the execution of His commands.

His images of kings and princes, no doubt, reveal his high regard for kingship and royalty but the remarkable fact that emerges is that Donne does not appreciate the queen or the king in particular. The literature of the Elizabethan age has a great many eulogistic metaphors for Elizabeth I. But Donne is silent about her or even about James I. It seems that what Donne hails in a king or queen is the idea of supremacy, power and material advancement.

Whereas kingship represents supremacy and self-sufficiency, courts, which are "Torrid Zone", represent corruption and moral decay. Donne ascribes even the corruption of a king to his courtiers. He is so fond of the metaphor of kings and courts that even the ghastly idea of body being eaten up by worms finds a very apposite image:

77. "To Mr Tilman after he had taken orders", Poetical Works, p.320.
Think thee a Prince, who of themselves create Wormes which insensibly devour their State.78

Donne has written one whole poem "Satyre IV. The Perfume", on the corruption and malpractices prevalent in the courts of his day in Britain and other European countries. Those who "dwell at Court" are "prone to all ill" and a court is a "hell". The "painted courtiers" are full of treachery. They can define love in the sense that they are "blinde" like love itself. They also stand for injustice as they favour only those "which were their owne before".79 Donne's choice of imagery from the courts, which brings a dark picture of the courtiers, seems to be a sort of reaction against the inner struggle that the poet might possibly be undergoing, while his eulogistic praise of men and women from the court reflects his desire to satisfy his ambitions. Courts, then, are symbolic of his physical world, which stands for death and decay.

Treason and conspiracy are also related to kings and courts. Kings are always in danger of "treason". But the "kings" of love are superior to a temporal king as they have no fear of any treason against them, because:

......none can doe
Treason to us, except one of us two.80

80. Idem.
The tight secracy about the sickness or death of a king has to be maintained in order to avoid any treason or struggle for succession. This may define the secracy that should be maintained about the death of Elizabeth Drury, whom Donne has represented a perfection of virtues and whose death has resulted in general decay of this world. The very idea of such treason by evil forces to rule the world in her absence makes "mankinde feeling now a generall thaw".

Military actions and battles are related to "treason", Donne's poetry draws a large number of images from the warfare. He had a very close acquaintance with the war activities. He witnessed the recurrent Irish rebellion against the reign of Elizabeth I, which brewed disastrously between 1594-96 under the leadership of Tyrone; the defeat of the Spanish Armada; Catholic Vs. Protestant struggles in Europe and he also felt the animosity of the French who "in her lunatique giddiness did hate" the English. His volunteering in naval expeditions, apart from what he heard and read about other wars of his time, made him to think over the psychology of war and his poems reflect his vision of it. He treats war to be a sickness - "Auge", a game of ignorants. He wrote one whole poem "Loves Warre" and limelighted the triviliality and precariousness of war by contrasting it with love's

warfare. He mocks at the English piracy of the Spanish gold traffic with South Africa which brought enormous wealth but involved great hardships:

And Midas joyes our Spanish journeys give
We touch all gold, but find no food to live.  

Though Donne disliked war yet his poetry draws many images from the warfare to define different moods in love and devotion. The metaphor of warfare can also define the all pervasive struggle for power and position. Thus, in the "Courts Squardon" there is a continuous rivalry among courtiers to "marshall their state".

Different situations in love can, similarly, be illustrated effectively through war metaphors. Internal disturbances that may lead a country to civil strife have been used to expose an unrequitting and heartless lady who conspires to kill her lover. Such love "can tenne in less space devour". The sudden shocking and violent death of the lovers caused by the beloved's inconstancy is like unanticipated canon charge massacring large troops:

Hee Swallows us, and never chawes;
By him, as by chain'd shot, whole rankes doe dye.  

The images of invasion, struggle and massacre frequently

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83. "The broken heart", Ibid., p. 44.
occur in his poems. The act of wooing each other is like attacking a fort. All, who are in love, are those "whom loves subliming fire invades". Human body is like a city and the bewitching and irresistible charms of the beloved are like attacking armies. The lover defending himself in the beginning through the fortifications of caution and hesitation ultimately succumbs to the "great shot" from the beloved's armies. The army custom, that towns which resist until reduced by heavy artillery must surrender unconditionally, applies to "loves warfare" also. The beloved may also be compared to a city, resisting strongly the attacks of the lover. But the lover is a determined foe who, "hop'st her stiffness by long siege to bow". But, this war has got a different nature, because even after the battle is won - the city seized - the war of love continues. The battles are now fought between two souls to "advance their state". The scene of actual warfare is introduced, the armies are ready to attack each other and the generals are busy in final negotiations because "Fate Suspends, uncertain victorie". Now the victory is not possible, only the compromise is the possibility. This war is different from the actual war because "There men kill men, we'll make one by and by". Thus, Donne employs the war image effectively and achieves the desired effect.


Donne's personal experiences with war are clearly reflected through his images. His minute observation of the battlefield activities is discernible in his description of an attack when compared to love's war which is free from the weapons of actual war: "Neere thrusts, pikes, stabs, ye bullets hurt not here".\(^{86}\) Names of weapons and terms related to war have been used as images. Squardon reminds him of largeness of number e.g. the "Squardon of white Confessors". Terms such as "Batter", "Rammes", "Slings", "battery", "Pistoles", "Artillerie", "Legions", "muster up", "Usurpt towne", "Captive", "Cannons" etc. are used as images. The cannon image in "The Progresse of the Soule" is superb for its sensuous appeal, vividness and efficaciousness. The large fins of the whale supported by its huge body produce such roaring sounds when they bump on the water, that they "teare" the air like cannon shots. The vibration also creates endless range of circles in the water. The image suggests the hugeness and strength of the whale in highly imaginative manner:

\[\text{At every stroke his brazen finnes do take,} \\
\text{More circles in the broken sea they make} \\
\text{Then cannons voices, when the aire they teare.}\]^\(^{87}\)

Donne's religious poetry contains a relatively less number of images from battlefield probably because the


\(^{87}\) "The Progresse of the Soule", Ibid., p.280.
memories of his own experience in the battlefield might have faded by then. However, his struggle against the idea of sin and evil forces evokes some images of war. He has fears of being taken "Captiv'd" like a "usurpt towne" by God's "enemie", and appeals God to "Batter" his heart and "imprison" him. This imprisonment, paradoxically, is the delivery from the heavy weight of sins.

As battles and wars are won and lost through the active role of spies, so is the case with love's warfare. Spies played even greater role in the Elizabethan days as they were employed to draw people on and entrap them by themselves uttering libels and treasons, specially in religious matters. The "Giant Statutes" were ready to "Sucke" them even "for hearing" such spies. Thus spies were the agents of misery and doom, persons to be avoided. But Donne does not use the metaphor of spy in this limited sense. Angels are, then, "Faiery Sprights" - spies of God to guard this world.

In love, a lover has to overcome many "spies and rivals" in the beginning. Even the rays of sun are like spies that peep into the room stealthily to spy the lovers. Even a husband may spy his wife with "household spies". The eyes - "glasses" - of the lovers are like the spies that detect and know what is in the heart of the other. Their faces appear in the eyes of each other:
My face is thine eye, thine in mine appeares. 88
And true plain hearts doe in the faces rest,

With kings and courts are associated law and imprisonment. Donne's images of imprisonment result from two unforgettable events of his life. First, his own imprisonment which his clandestine marriage brought as a dowry by altering his career for ever. For a poetic mind, however, it had a positive aspect, that the suffering it brought (to take a Christian view) purged him and sealed the validity and purity of his love. This finds echoes in his poetry time and again. The second event was the prosecutions and trials which the Catholics had to face. He lived it in his own family in form of his brother's death by gaol fever in 1593, imprisoned for harbouring a priest; and the prosecution of his uncle Jesper Heywood, for becoming a Jesuit. Thus, the "dumbe and speechlesse" "oppress shoe" 89 of the lover evoke a picture of the fortitude of the stubborn Catholic prisoners who were tortured and pressed to talk and plead their case, who kept their mouths sealed in order to avoid greater agony for their dependents because in the event of their guilt being proved their property was also liable to be seized besides the actual punishment. For Donne, imprisonment is not only being in prison, rather any sort of confinement is

imprisonment, even "To live in one land, is captivitie". It is being completely sterilized, dehumanized:

To me in a ship is to intarrel
Mee in a prison, that weare like to fall. 90

Imprisonment, however, in love brings a positive picture. It is a sense of possession and unity in love that imprisonment suggests: "Thine arms imprison me, and myne armes thee." 91 This can be true in case of love for God too. How paradoxically he expresses his passionate yearning to be accepted by God:

Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I
Except you'enthrall mee, never shall be free. 92

Donne very often employs images from law which reflect his background as a law student. Law has always been a subject of common interest as "Litigious men" move "quarrels" at all times. Different moods and situations in love as well as divine speculation have been expressed through legal metaphors. He had seen legal proceedings and presented them in an imagined love situation where the beloved is the judge and a lawyer (Coscus) is pleading before her. The poem offers a full length proceeding of a love court thus:

91. Idem.
A motion, Lady: Speake Coscus: I have beene
In love, ever since tricesimo of the Queene,
Continuall claims I have made, injunctions got
To stay my rivals suit, that hee should not
Proceed; spare mee; In Hilary terme I went,
You said, If I return'd next size in Lent,
I should be in remitter of your grace;
In th'interim my letters should take place
Of affidavits: 93

Even divine powers are described in legal terms.
Divine supremacy has been expressed as "great
soveraigntie" and "absolute Prerogative". In the past
"Prerogatives" were limited to qods only but now "every
modern god" wants to "extend/ His vast Prerogative" 94
according to his desire. The "Modern" state is prone to
deavour the rights of people:

And how prerogative these states devours,
Transferr'd from Love himselfe, to womankinde, 95

The term "prerogative" evokes the sense of devouring,
injustice, exploitation and usurpation. In other words,
the state could usurp the rights of others because of its
superior position.

The courtiers who decide such "prerogatives" are
"blinde" like love itself. In love as well as in court "A
non obstante" or "dispensation" is not possible for those

94. "Loves Diet", Ibid., p.49.
who are deserving. Donne finds law more an agent of injustice than justice. It is at par with an adulterous lady, who:

[poem]

is all faire, but yet hath foule long nailes,
With which she scraucheth Suiters;

If law is the personal property of judges, then, asks the poet, "Where wilt thou appeale?" Thus, Donne is highly critical of the law courts of his time. Even in a mood of divine contemplation, when he laments over the corruption of priests who instigate sin instead of annihilating it, he finds a metaphor from law:

That living law, the Magistrate,  
Which to give us, and make us physicke, doth  
Our vices often aggravate;

He uses many terms from law in his poems, for example, "Undertaking", "legacie", "joynture", "Antedate", "decree", "Subsidies", "Seales" etc. He has written full length poems bearing legal titles viz. "The Undertaking", "The Will", and "The Legacie". In "The Legacie", the lover imagines himself dead (as the separation from his beloved is death for a lover) and bequeathes his legacy to his beloved. In "The Will" also death is imagined and will is made. "Joynture" is also a term from law that finds frequent occurrence:

Beasts doe no joyntures lose
Though they new lovers choose.

The image is very convincing. Since separation for lover is death - and inconstancy is also a sort of separation - why should the beloved be not permitted to use "joyntures" - i.e. her right to love others - after she has left her first lover? The image, thus, is in keeping with the main line of argument in the poem i.e. free love. The term "joynture" may also define a spiritual situation. The poet, in his communion with God, tells that he has inherited "deaths conquest" from Christ as his "joynture".

It is a king that issues currency. Since king represents supremacy on the earth, it is not only "Kings real" face but also "his stamped face" that people crave for to bring material advancement. Donne has employed images of coins as well. It is the "Stampe" of a king that imparts value to a coin, which is otherwise an ordinary piece of metal as it is the "prerogative" of a king to mint coins. Similarly, a beautiful and perfectly virtuous lady reserves the right of "Mintage to other beauties". The metaphor can explain the relationship between lover and beloved also. The beloved, a king, "stamps the heart of the lover with her impression and makes the lover's heart her "Medall". This relationship of king and coin:

makes her love mee,
As Kings do coynes, to which their stamps impart
The value: 100

So it is only the beautiful beloved who can lend value to
the lover's tears. His "teare" becomes a "world" in
itself the moment the beloved's face appears on it, devoid
of her image it is "nothing" - a mere water drop.
Precisely, the beloved is, like a king, mighty and
supreme. The vivid and convincing conceit emphasises more
than one points of similarity between the coin and the
tear. Both are of round shape, both are "nothing" unless
the face of the king or the beloved is stamped on them and
both become symbols of power and great value after the
process of "Mintage" is over. The metaphor may be used in
spiritual matters as well; our soul is the coin of God
bearing His stamp and can win us salvation if we keep its
health intact:

Did this Coine beare any other stampe, then his,
That gave thee power to doe, me, to say this. 101

Donne often plays with the double meaning of "Angel" as a
coin and a spirit, a beautiful example of such ingenious
play upon the pun can be seen in the "Elegie XI. The
Bracelet" where the pun runs throughout the poem. The
central image from money and currency is that of a coin.

100. "Elegie X. The Dreame", Poetical Works, pp. 84 f.
Apart from its value as a means of advancement, it becomes significant also because of its roundness of shape like a circle, a womb or a globe.

Like a coin, gold is the symbol of power and wealth. For Donne, gold is the symbol of eternity, elasticity and perfection. To a virtuous soul, like gold, "no fire, nor rust can spend or waste". In love, it evokes the sense of true love. Its quality of "ayery thinnesse" without getting broken makes it superior to other metals. Pure and spiritual love, like gold, does not break even if expanded upto transparency. Thus the "condensed conceit" presents the idea vividly and aptly:

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

The metaphor of gold is also used by Donne to show a lover persuading his beloved. The value of gold lies in its being in circulation, not in mines. Similarly, as the poet tells in "The Will", the beauty of a girl is meaningless if she is not appreciated and wooed. Gold has also been used in sexual sense as he calls women "Golden Mines". Because of its value gold may be an agent of

102. "To the Lady Bedford. You that are she", Poetical Works, p.205.
vices as well. The beloved may be "melted" and be "corrupted" by her new "lover's gold".

Donne is not a poet of nature. It is because the search for reality could be completed more by erudite and religious metaphor than by nature. However, some beautiful images have been employed from nature specially of flowers and gardening. He very often compares women to flowers. Both have a process of growth and attract, and delight others by their beauty and sweetness. They are both transient but the beloved is unaware of the fact that:

That it will freeze anon, and that I shall 105
To morrow finde thee falne, or not at all.

The ecstatic mood of satisfaction in love is represented by "The violets reclining head". Then, love is like "boughs" as it experiences "blossome". Primrose flowers appear to the poet as the symbols of "true love". They are like "Manna" sent from "heaven". Their beauty reminds him of twinkling stars forming "a terrestriall Galaxie". Though Donne, being a city poet, is not fond of nature imagery, however, he observed the flora and fauna very closely. He defines the situations through nature metaphor which can not be described through words. How beautifully does he present the picture of a girl


T6385
undressing herself, which otherwise would have been vulgar and obscene, "As when from flowry meads th'hills shadow steales". The image, apart from its visual appeal, works at mental level and conveys the sense of glad excitement on revelation of a mystery. At sunset, he finds sun "gallop lively downe the Westerne hill". The metaphor of grass is also employed to explain the nature of true love. Both have growth and endurance against unfavourable seasons. Love can endure "Vicissitude, and season", like grass. If love succumbs to vicissitudes—separation—its not true love.

Images have come from winter and spring also. Winter for him represents "sleep", loss of growth, night, darkness, sorrow and decay. This aspect of winter shall be discussed in the forthcoming chapter. Spring, on the other hand stands for love, vigour, joy, curing power and bloosom as "Love by the spring is growne". The "balmes" produced by "spring" have the power to "cure every thing".

Metaphors from nature may also define an inconstant unfaithful and flirting lady. In "Elegie VI",

he gives an account of such lady through an appealing conceit which shows his penetrating insight into the mysterious phenomena of nature. The expanded conceit which is "one of the rare examples of Donne basing a conceit on natural observation"109 is unique for its imaginative appeal:

When I behold a streme, which, from the spring,
Doth with doubtfull melidious murmuring,
Or in a speechlesse slumber, calmly ride
Her wedde channels bosome, and then chide
And bend her browes, and swell if any bough
Do but stoop downe, or kiss her upmost brow:

xx

xx

Then say I; that is shee, and this am I.110

Birds also occur in Donne's poetry. In the Epithalamion on Lady Elizabeth's marriage he presents "Larke", "Dove", "sparrow", "household Bird" and "the red stomacher" to define various characteristics of love.

Many of his nature images are from gardening and horticulture, therefore, they are technical. The hands of the lover and the beloved "entergraft" show their physical union which leads to "a new concoction" increasing the strength of the souls. This union is a sort of transplantation resulting in the growth and multiple vigour of love:


110. "Elegie VI. Oh, let me not serve so", Poetical Works, p.79.
A single violet transplant,  
The strength, the colour, and the size,  
(All which before was poore, and scant,)  
Redoubles still, and multiplies.  

"Teeming" as in "The teeming earth" has the sense  
of multiple vigorous growth. Images of harvesting,  
gleaning and reaping are also found in his poems.  
Harvesting has association with virtues and knowledge.  
Good qualities are to be cultivated and harvested like a  
crop as we are "farmers of our selves". Our soul needs  
proper husbanding to save it from "Soyles disease" - sins  
of body. Plough may be used as a symbol of spiritual and  
theological exploration; but it has to be a "holy plough".  
Images of ploughing and tillage are generally used in  
sexual sense e.g. "Above the earth, the earth we Till and  
love". But, tilling has more a sense of harshness and  
wildness, an unnatural process: "Tillage of a harsh rough  
man".  

Imaginative aspect of nature is not common in  
Donne. Even in his images of flowers, he is more concerned  
with their technical aspects such as growth or  
transplantation that result in "abler soule" and "Defects  
of loneliness countroles". The fears of loneliness and the  
desire to have an "abler soul" are very important features  

of Donne's personality. Image of transplantation is, thus, the key image from nature that fascinates him and thereby serves as a tool in the creation of an "abler soule" which he tries to achieve in his religious poems.

Images of animals, beasts, worms and insects have generally been employed with their traditional symbolic meanings, for example, the images of "hony" and "hive" evoke the sense of abundance and purity. Thus, knowledge, like "hony" has quintessencial properties. The metaphor can define the "Sacred" hunger for knowledge:

Is not thy braines rich hive  
Fulfil'd with hony which thou dost derive  
From the Arts spirits and their Quintessence?  

In love, colt defines an untrained girl whereas horse stands for an experienced beloved. Most of the images of animals and beasts are aimed at highlighting corruption and decay, which he found in the core of this world and suffered long to get rid of. If the foxes and goats are symbols of lechery and promiscuity, the wolves, vultures, swine and ravan are agents of corruption, hunger and decay. Ape stands for deception and spiders and tode are representations of evil, vice and sin. Snakes and other creeping insects remind him of corruption and decay leading to hell being associated with Satan. Pies as

gluttonous like court officers devour all property of the
law suitors.

Images of food - gluttony, banquets and feasts -
echo the luxurious life led by the courtiers and the rich
of his day. Donne often seems critical of such wastage. He
finds it responsible for the misery and sufferings of the
deprecated. He finds the "devouring stomach" of law
officers responsible for "gluttonous delays" in justice.
But "hunger" finds a positive meaning in Donne, probably
because, contrary to feasts and banquets, hunger is a
universal phenomenon. So the pursuit of knowledge and
learning is represented as "sacred hunger of science".

As Donne himself was a frequent visitor of plays, a
few images from theatre find occurrence in his poetry. In
plays actors wear false appearances and perform the roles
assigned to them. They imitate our actual life where
"Cities are Sepulchers; they who dwell there/ Are
carcases". 115 It is this sense of decay that haunts
Donne. He finds life itself a stage where we are merely
puppets in the hands of fate. His own assailing
uncertainties of life seem to dominate when he talks of
the "Worlds stage". In a mood of divine contemplation in
"Holy Sonnet VI", he is afraid that his "playes last

115. "To Sr Henry Wotton. Sir, more than Kisses",
Poetical Works, p.160.
scene" may "presse" him "to hell" due to his "sinnes".

This sense of aloofness of the troubled mind is reflected when he tells his friend T.W.:

My verse, the strict Map of my misery,  
Shall live to see that, for whose want I dye". 116

Since map represents reality, his poetry is the representation of his inner realities, his suffering mind. What the poet failed to achieve, he hopes his poetry would acquire. Poetry, thus, becomes an escape from the harsh realities of life. It seems to be this sense of escape that makes him define the relationship between a poet and his poetry in ecclesiastical terms: "I am thy Creator, thou my Saviour". 117 The creation of this new world marks his journey from physical to religious, because it is in religion that the best is achieved. This escapism, however, should not mean that his poetry shuns reality. Rather, he explores this earth to achieve the divine world.

Various aspects of erudition in the poetry of Donne have been widely criticised, for instance, his conceits which are excessively witty and far fetched. Among his

116. "To Mr T. W. At once, from hence", Poetical Works, p.182.
117. To Mr T. W. Hast thee harsh verse", Ibid., p.181.
major critics is Dr. Johnson who criticises metaphysical poetry because it is:

......a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike....The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together...118

Replying to this charge of heterogeneity, remarks A.J. Smith: "Nothing could be more brilliant, in the circumstances, than that illustrious description of yoking of heterogeneous things by violence together".119 The comparison in the images and conceits of Donne should not be called heterogeneity because in that sense most poetry is heterogeneous. T.S. Eliot rightly remarks that, "a degree of heterogeneity of material compelled into unity by the operation of the poet's mind is omnipresent in poetry".120 Dr. Johnson uses the term "wit" for this "combination of dissimilar images". But, really speaking, wit is an attempt to see the object or the action whole or from various points of view simultaneously. This may

involve seeing things both as good and bad, pleasant and disagreeable, serious and comical. It is an essentially rational perception of things, and Donne's conceit is an effective means of expressing such perception. A certain kind of objectivity is expressed through wit. It is through the use of wit that "conflicting attitudes" about love have been presented by Donne. Natural and effective use of erudite imagery makes Sullivan observe that Donne's conceits are not so "far fetched" as Johnson thought. They are "more clever, more ingenious, but not necessarily more remote than the concepts and examples of Renaissance books of rhetoric and logic".  

The element of wit and intellect in his poems has been so much overemphasised by some critics that they seem to ignore emotions in it. Though A. J. Smith calls metaphysical poetry "a poetry of wit", Donne's poems are not purely intellectual, rather they present a fine juxtaposition of emotion and intellect. At the root of most of the poems lies the emotion of love, friendship or devotion.

Even those images and conceits that appear to be

the most far fetched and unhuman are closely knit up, human and delicate. The argument can be substantiated by discussing the conceit of compasses in "A Valediction: forbidding mourning". It will appear far fetched if "strict literal interpretation" is demanded at every stage. Apparently non-human and indelicate, the conceit is animated and delicate in its rich emotional implication. The "stiffe twin compasses" take a series of images which impart them human touch, almost animate them and bring at par with the parting lovers. The verbs are: "move", "Sit", "rome", "leans", "hearkens", "growes", "comes", "runne" and "makes". The charge that the image "Thy firmnes makes my circle just" is "not exact" as on the completion of the circle the distance between the two legs remains the same, holds no weight. The idea of "perfection" is very well indicated by the completion of the circle which is the symbol of infinity and perfection in Donne. So far as the returning of the moving foot to the "fixt foot" is concerned, it will happen automatically once the function is over. Likewise, the lovers will join each other after the journey is over. Home coming is an integral part of the process of going out.

Erudite imagery is used to substantiate his argument and support the chain of thought that he is to develop in his poems. What matters is the clarify and firmness of definition which can be found only in an intellectual parallel. His imagery demands the readers to follow his thought intellectually. To assess that his choice of imagery shows his desire to display is learning would be improper. First, because his was the age of renaissance when learning and a new awakening for intellectual height was in the air. Secondly, the coterie of limited friends and acquaintances among whom the poems were circulated all belonged to the educated class among whom his reputation as a scholar and poet spread with remarkable quickness. Besides, his argumentative style demanded such imagery, which, in turn was essential for his search for reality. In other words, his imagery, erudite as well as secular, serves as an effective tool in his sublime pursuit. He himself was aware of the fact that he could be called harsh and obscure as in his verse letter to Mr. S. B. he says:

I sing not, Siren like, to tempt; for I
Am harsh: 127

126. Dr. Johnson in his "Life of Cowley", Op.Cit., p.19 and Helen Gardner in The Metaphysical Poets (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1957), passim, have emphasised the point that the aim of the metaphysical poets was to show their learning as they were men of learning.

127. "To Mr S. B. O Thou which", Poetical Works, p.187.
The argument can be further substantiated by finding a link between the key images that have been discussed in the chapter. Circle, the traditional figure of infinity and perfection, with another set of images having one or the other aspect of similarity with it, links together the diverse range of images. Such images are: compass, that defines true love and as an instrument of forming circles forms a link between heaven and earth; sun, symbolising perfection; king and God, again symbolic of perfection at the level of this world and the whole universe respectively; coins, round shaped like a circle, bearing the stamp of a king; transplantation, resulting in "abler soule"; "Lamp of Balsamum", ensuring spiritual enlightenment; phoenix, fascinating the poet for its uniqueness and immortality; "Alembeck", mysterious like religion and God; pregnancy and womb, embodying the process of creation within their round shape; sea and court, forming the circle of corruption and sin; India, the symbol of perfection in wealth, knowledge and virtues; and map, the means of achieving reality. All the images were conjured by a mind in search of truth and they serve as a tool in the process. It is these images that make a poetic reality out of the raw material of life in the same fashion as a cartographer can convert a round ball into reality:
On a round ball
A workman that hath copies by, can lay
An Europe, Afrique, and an Asia,
And quickly make that, which was nothing, All. 128