CHAPTER-III

LOVE, DEATH AND DISEASE IMAGERY

The pursuit of reality, which is the essential purpose of Donne's erudite and secular imagery continued in his love, death and disease images as well. He explores the physical reality by discussing the mystery and secrets of love, variety of moods, role of body and soul in love. But, love which finds its outlet through the senses and the body, has to suffer from death and disease as they are the ultimate fate of the body. Donne, like Webster and some other poets of his time was much possessed by death\(^1\) and his poetry abounds in death and

\(^{1}\) T. S. Eliot in his poem "Whispers of Immortality", Selected Poems (1961; rpt. London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p.42 has emphasised the theme of death in Webster and Donne:

WEBSTER was much possessed by death
And saw the skull beneath the skin;
And breastless creatures under ground
Leaned backward with a lipless grin.

Donne, I suppose, was such another
Who found no substitute for sense;
To seize and clutch and penetrate,
Expert beyond experience.

He knew the anguish of the marrow
The Ague of the skeleton;
No contact possible to flesh
Allayed the fever of the bone.
disease imagery. The great commonplace theme of his sermons is death, and his poems, secular as well as religious, are no exception. He realised that man was nothing but "a quintessence of dust".  

Donne, a celebrated love poet, dramatises in his love poetry different moods and situations in love objectively. He does not confine the universal emotion of love within a fixed pattern as some poets do, rather he presents its variety as it exists in the actual life. As the speaker in various love poems is not the poet himself, there is no need to suppose that every poem had its corresponding anaecdote. To trace out any development or philosophy in his love poems is very difficult as "dubieties of tone make them resistant to summaries of any kind".  

However, some efforts have been made to find his representative voice. William Zunder finds the structure of his love poetry similar to that of Twelfth Night. As Viola's love is central in Twelfth Night, the other love stories being secondary to it, so he finds poems such as "The Canonization" and "Aire and Angles" where the "centre to the love poetry is to be found".  

three stages in his love poetry viz. the purgative, the illuminative and the unitive. The purpose here is not to discuss love as a theme but to study the images related to love and thereby to trace out how varying moods in love find their eloquent expression through the images which reveal Donne's attitude towards love.

Many of the Elizabethan love poets were greatly influenced by the fourteenth century Italian poet Petrarch. Petrarchan images occur frequently in Donne's poetry too. Though he "led the reaction against Petrarchism in England" yet "he still remained a Petrarchist to some extent". He refers to the sighs, "teares", "heats" and "colds" of the lovers, which are, in the Petrarchan tradition, "love's meat and drink", and are to be collected and used, as in "Twicknam Garden", to "judge" the sincerity of the beloved. The beloved is addressed, in one of his verse letters to Mr I. L., as the "beauteous sun", a "paradise" whose breasts are "heasts" of love. The beloved is like the sun: "Here layes a shee

Sunne, and a hee Moone here", and the terrestrial sun wants to borrow light from her. Women are not only "like Angles" but the beloved is like Christ and to a blessed lover only she reveals her secret beauties. In one of his poems, viz. "A Feaver", he takes up the Petrarchan idea that the death of his beloved has left the world without a sun and thus destroyed the whole world. He develops the idea into a conceit to prove that the very existence of the world depends on the existence of his beloved. In case she dies the world will be left nothing more than the beloved's "Carkasse", the fairest woman her "ghost" and the worthiest men "corrupt worms".

The remarkable thing about Donne's Petrarchan imagery is that it occurs more frequently in his epistolary verses and eulogistic poems than in his love poems. In one of his verse letters to the Countess of Bedford, for example, he glorifies the Countess with Petrarchan metaphors. Even "saints" crave for her blessings as she is the "First good Angell" and "Gods masterpeec". Her "deeds, accesses and restraints" are worth studying. The eulogy crosses all limits when the poet tells her that she can ensure heaven for him:

For so God helpe mee, 'I would not misse you there
For all the good which you can do me here.  

The imagery and argument of "The first Anniversary"
is Petrarchan as it is in "A Fever". The main argument
of the two "Anniversaries" is that the death of Elizabeth
Drury, who was embodiment of perfect virtue and beauty,
has disrupted the order of this world and has left it to
decay. The eulogy places the girl in such a super human-
almost divine - stature that Ben Jonson declared it "full
of Blasphemies". But the imagery is Petrarchan only in
those portions where the girl is praised, the rest of the
poems contemplate on the general decay of the world and
the girl is almost out of his mind. "The second
Anniversarie" ends with an obliteration of "all traces of
Petrarchan compliment".

No doubt, the speaker in some of Donne's poems
speaks in the language of tears and sighs, flatters his
beloved and expresses himself in hyperbolic language to
show his undivided and unflinching devotion to her.
However, these are not meant to prove that he believed in

9. "To the Countesse of Bedford. Madam, Reason is our
Soules left hand", Poetical Works, p.168.
10. Mauris Bewley, John Donne: Selected Poetry (New
11. "Conversations with Drummond" Ben Jonson, ed.
Harford and Simpson, Vol.1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press,
1925-52), p.133.
Petrarchan love tradition. The case with verse letters, which were addressed to the ladies of high rank to win their favour, is quite different. The images in other secular poems, specially in love poems, are used parodically. In "Elegie VIII" he employs both Petrarchan and anti-Petrarchan images. "Elegie XVIII" is a parody on Petrarchan euphemistic sensuous descriptions. The poet uses a series of hyperbolic Petrarchan metaphors to describe the beauty of the beloved. Her beauty is a "Paradice", because her eyes are "two suns", her cheeks "rosie Hemisphere", her chin is "Promontory" and:

....the streight Hellespont betweene
The Sestos and Abydos of her breasts,
(Nor of two Lovers, but two loves the neasts)
Succeeds a boundless sea, 13

But the whole Petrarchan atmosphere created through such images collapses and becomes a parody by the end of the poem when he brings vulgar inclinations through the metaphor of "Two purses".

In one of his letters to the Countess of Huntington he clearly expresses his views about love, which also reflects his views on the Petrarchan tradition. In Donne's poems, the Petrarchan treasures of love — "sighs",

"teares", and oaths are used not to woo or win her heart but to "purchase" the beloved, for example, in "Lovers infiniteness". In one of his poems viz. "The Apparition", which is a "Pungent attack upon the conventions of romantic love", the lover contemplates his death so that his apparition may frighten the beloved who has been cruel to him. The Petrarchan lover, on the other hand, would have shown self pitying attitude accepting all buffets from his beloved. But, for Donne, love is not one sided:

It can not bee
Love, till I love her, that loves mee.

... it can not bee
I should love her, who loves not mee.15

Unlike Petrarch, Donne's beloved is not a deity. She is attainable with the riches of this world. The lover and the beloved in Donne are men and women, not allegorical figures or frigid abstractions. Most often, the beloved is beautiful like a flower; she grows and blossoms like a flower and shares its transience. In his autobiographical poem "A Valediction: forbidding mourning", he requests his beloved not to cause any "teare floods" and "sigh tempests" at the time of parting, as

their love, which has transcended the physical and has become spiritual, is pure and cared "lessco, eyes, lips, and hands to miss". For him reciprocity is the essential characteristic of love. On the whole, most often he seems to reject the "Stock conceits" of the Petrarchan poetry as Shakespeare is reported to have done. This attitude towards Petrarchan poetry can be taken as a reply to the charges of cynicism also. His cynicism in some of the poems is not to be taken very seriously because they seem to be more of a reaction against the traditional poetic trend, than his own opinion. His approach towards love being realistic he does not enjoy in the glorification of female beauty.

Images related to sex are frequent in Donne. In describing the personality of Donne, R.C. Bald has observed that "he made the discovery first of sex and then of love". If the influence of Paracelsus on Donne in his alchemical and medical images is self-evident, his

18. Katherine M. Wilson in her book Shakespeare's Sugared Sonnets (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1974), passim, argues that Shakespeare's Sonnets do not have any real man or woman behind them rather they are parodies on the Elizabethan fondness of Petrarch.
insistance on the mutual necessity of man and woman in love also guides Donne's thought. Poetry of Donne, specially secular, draws many images from sex. His images of tillage and ploughing show how he defines the act of love making through such images. He feels that women can "put on perfection, and a woman's name" by this act. Therefore, images such as "Above the earth, the earth we Till and love" are often found in some of his elegies viz. VIII, XVIII and XIX. In love he does not underrate the importance of body and physical union. Rather he imparts to such union the religious heights:

Like an appointed lambe, when tenderly
The priest comes on his knees t'embowell her:

He uses the sex metaphors even to express the divine love. He interweaves his desire for spiritual rest with a need for the emotional serenity he experienced in sex:

Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I
Except you'enthral mee, never shall be free,
Nor ever chast, except you ravish mee.

21. See above p. 86.
He has fears that the devil may 'usurp' him. This fascination for sex imagery does not mean that it was everything for him: he also believes that "each such Act", "Diminisheth the length of life a day".\textsuperscript{26}

He also employs erotic images at times but they transcend vulgarity through their suggestiveness. The idea of nakedness in "Elegie XIX" is presented through a beautiful image indicating a sense of discovery of something very rare and precious:

O my America! my new-found-land,
My Kingdom, saeflicowt when with one man man'd,
My Myne of precious stones.\textsuperscript{27}

The image of precious stone sublimes the erotic element in the poem. The "precious stones", apart from their brightness, wonder and wealth evoke a sense of coldness too. This leads, along with the metaphor of "America", to forget the "particular" for "personified universal" and "apostrophizes"\textsuperscript{28} the idea of nakedness.

Apart from their suggestiveness, Donne's sex images are remarkable for their transcendence from the physical. They are about physical pleasures but at the same time

\begin{itemize}
  \item 26. "Farewell to love", Poetical Works, p.63.
  \item 27. "Elegie XIX. Going to bed", Ibid., p.107.
\end{itemize}
they tend to transcend such pleasures and often the lofty spiritual undertones, for example, consider the following lines:

Full nakedness! All joyes are due to thee,
As souls unbodied, bodies uncloth'd must be,
To taste whole joyes.29

The "full joyes" that he gets from the nakedness are like those experienced by "soules unbodied" - the pleasure of divine presence that souls experience after being freed from the bounds of body. This is a sort of mystification of the physical pleasures. The same attitude towards nakedness may be found in "Satyre I" also where he tells that "our Soules" "are banished" of bliss unless they are "unapparrelled" of bodies.

Since body is the "booke", love begins at the level of body and subsequently transcends to soul. At the initial state, there are sufficient chances of its death. Donne based one whole poem on the metaphor of shadow and defined love through it. In "A Lecture upon the Shadow" he tells that in the beginning love may have "shadows" of "disguise" but when it is at its zenith, there should be no "shadows". If they are there, the day of love would end instantly. Precisely, in true love there is no place for

simulations and dissimulations. The poet defines the beginning of love, its various stages and situations through images. Girls throw "beauties nets" to win lovers, but the lover may apply "masculine pervasive force" to overcome the initial non-responsiveness of the beloved. At this stage the lover has to overcome "Spies" and "rivals" as well so he keeps "spie on spie". Love is an art and has its own idiom which the lovers use:

Varied our language through all dialects,  
Of becks, winks, looks, and often under-boards  
Spoke dialogues with our feet far from our words.  

But this language does not come on its own, it has got to be taught and inculcated. The lover in "Elegie VII" claims to have taught the beloved the "mystique language of the eye" to "judge the difference of the aire/ Of sighes": "the Alphabet/ Of flowers"; and "all the love trickes, that thy wit could reach". By training, he has to refine her:

...with amorous delicacies  
Refin'd thee'into a blis-full Paradise.  
Thy graces and good words my creatures bee;  
I planted knowledge and lifes tree in thee.

In the initial stage of love physical beauty of the beloved works like "milk" that nurses love and makes it

30. "Elegie XII. His parting from her", Poetical Works, p. 91.
"growne strong enough" but in its advanced stage, the body becomes less important though not redundant altogether.

Body plays an active role as the language of love, kisses and embraces are the tokens of love that strengthen the relationship. Specially in conjugal relationships Donne has the basic image of a bridegroom gently wooing the bashful bride, it is this process which works as a preliminary stage, a stepping stone, to the advanced stage of love where the lovers transcend the stage of mere physical union. 'Kisses' are the tokens of love that can "mingle Soules", what the lover craves for is the "divine impression of stolne kisses". But if the kiss is a "last lamenting kisse", as in "The Expiration", it "sucks two soules, and vapors Both away".  

Apart from "kisses" the other "blisses" that the lovers enjoy are "Of meetings, conferences, embraces". Embracing involves even a deeper sense of possession and union than kisses, so: "Thyne armes imprison me, and myne armes thee".  

33. "Elegie XII. His parting from her", Ibid., p.91.  
As stated earlier, the lover and the beloved in Donne are always creatures of this world. Whatever heights they might achieve, they start at the initial stage from the body itself. Actually their love is a two-side affair. Therefore, one of the two has to initiate. The poet defines the beginning of their love in terms of the worldly metaphors. The bewitching charms of the beloved are invading armies and the lover is a city; or, the lover may attack the beloved to win her whose "Stiffenesse" the lover hopes "by long seige to bow".\textsuperscript{35} In this warfare the defending side has to succumb. Donne is passionately fond of war imagery. He treats love also as a war though different in nature. At times this metaphor, apart from defining the true nature of love, brings out the meaninglessness and triviality as well as a sense of precariousness associated with the actual warfare. For illustration take "Loves Warre" which performs both these functions:

Other men war that they their rest may gayne;  
But wee will rest that wee may fight agayne.  
Those warrs the ignorant, these th'exp'ring'd love,  
There wee are always under, here above.\textsuperscript{36}

Though love is "blinde" in granting favours, yet once the lover succeeds in winning the favour of the

\textsuperscript{35} "The Blossome", Poetical Works, p.53.  
\textsuperscript{36} "Elegie XX. Loves Warre", Ibid., p.109.
beloved their love starts growing like grass. Both grass and love can endure "Vicissitude, and season". Growth of love is still better, as the growth once achieved may be hampered by winter but can not be abated. If so, it is not true love. No doubt, love needs to be "Stir'd" to maintain its growth but "No winter shall abate the springs encrease". 37

The experience of true love makes the lovers realise that they have awakened to a new world from a long sleep as they were "Wean'd" before falling in love. Now they have got a world of their own. Since their love is true, this world of love is far better and mightier than the terrestrial world as it is "Without sharpe North, without declining West". 38 The lover's bold assertion in "The Sunne Rising" that his beloved is "all States, and all Princes, I", clearly establishes love as the supreme force. This world of love is free from "rags of time". Even a king is no match to a lover. A kingdom may have to face treason and rebellion but in the kingdom of love:

...none can doe
Treason to us, except one of us two. 39

In some of his poems Donne explores the complex relationship between the body and the soul when in love. If the soul is like the prince, the body is like his subject. Love grows from the physical to the spiritual. The souls of the lovers are "knit" together after their bodies have already experienced this state. With their hands "Cemented" with a rich balme", they experience ecstasy and now their "mixt soules" pass through a subtle process of "concoction" and "abler soules" emerge out, which are free from any "dross" or allay. 40 This union in which the two souls are "entergraft" results in the multiplied growth of love. It is the state when the lover can claim that it is his "soule, whose child love is". 41 Though this love has to "take a body too" yet after achieving this state; it is strong enough to be independent of the external beauty. The lover assures the beloved "though I bid farewell,/ Thine, in my heart, where

40. "The Extasie", Poetical Works, pp.46-48. Commenting upon the role of body and soul as presented by Donne in this poem, Patricia Beer remarks that this poem is not the final and the only voice of Donne. He says, "It is neither his most nor his last characteristic voice. He has many, and his variety is an essential part of his work --." An Introduction to the Metaphysical Poets (London: Macmillan Press, 1972), p.52. However, the voice can be used as a step to determine the chain of development of his ideology about the true nature of love.

my soule dwels, shall dwell". 42 Or, he can assure the beloved of the unity of their souls through the famous compass conceit, and appeal her to keep unmoved by the absence because it is her "firmness", tells the lover, that "makes my circlce just,/ And makes me end, where I beginne". 43 Love of such pure nature can better be described through religious metaphors. Such lovers are "Canoniz'd for love", their love has angelic purity. Thus, Donne is fond of exchanging images between love and religion.

In order to suggest the unique beauty of the beloved he calls her a "Starre", a "Prince", a "queene" or even an "Angel". The beauty of her breasts can find parallel in the mythological "Proserpines white beauty - keeping chest". 44 Helen Gardner 45 finds this image unsatisfactory because she feels that the "beauty keeping chest" can not necessarily be white. But the attribute that the poet wants to transfer is more of beauty than of whiteness. Since the box contained beautifying ointment to

42. "Elegie V. His Picture", Poetical Works, p.77.
44. "Elegie VIII. The Comparison", Ibid., p.81.
be applied by Venus, it shares the element of beauty possessed by the ointment. In "Elegie VIII" he gives a detailed account of the beloved's beauty through geographical and mythological images. Such "mighty, amazing beauty" has power to move and can "make blinde men see".

But the ultimate reality at the level of body is death. Naturally, the beloved, who is extremely beautiful, is sure to lose her charms. Her physical beauty shall be soon "falne" or shall remain "not at all". It is like a flower that looks very beautiful when blossoming but within a short time fades and falls. Physical beauties are mere "Bubles shadow" — unreal and transitory. Love, that is based on body and outward beauties, is also subject to death and decay because the body itself is so. The lover, at times, realises the fact:

Love built on beauty, soone as beauty, dies
Chuse this face, chang'd by no deformities.

It is this realisation that makes the lover ask: "What hate could hurt our bodies like our love?" Such physical

46. See above p. 56 and p. 29.
49. "Elegie II. The Anagram", Ibid., p. 73.
50. "To the Countesse of Bedford. T'have written then", Ibid., p. 174.
love which melts the lovers is, "sublunary" and "dull" as it cares merely for "eyes", "lips" and "hands". Naturally, it can not tolerate the physical separation and brings "harmes and feares".

In order to show dislike towards intatuation for outward beauty, he employs images showing inconstancy and faithlessness of the beautiful women. A beautiful woman "hath foule long nailes,/ With which she scracheth suiters".\(^{50}\) She is "Open to all searchers". As we have already seen law brings a picture of injustice and water represents treachery and deception, a beautiful lady can "Antedate" new vow to justify her earlier inconstancy and to assure future constancy but her vows are "writ in water,/ And blowne away, with winde".\(^{51}\) To search a "woman true, and faire" is as difficult as to "catche a falling starre" or to get a child with "a mandrake roote".\(^{52}\) Such woman may be proud of her beauty but she forgets the ultimate reality that within a short time she will meet "Death" in her "cheekes" and "darkness" in her eyes. Donne finds outward beauties corruptible, and on them "spies" have to be employed. One of the influences on Donne for finding the physical beauty subject to corruption and

\(^{50}\) "Satyre II", Poetical Works, p. 151.

\(^{51}\) "Elegie XV. The Expostulation", Ibid., p. 97.

\(^{52}\) "Song", Ibid., p. 8.
decay, most probably, was the medieval view about the general corruptibility and decay of this world.

Images showing faithlessness and inconstancy, therefore, are generally associated with the beauty. Love based only on body i.e., outward beauty can not be "Inter-assured of the mind", and thus it can not be true and everlasting. If the beloved does not respond to the lover, then the unrequitted love is like death, and the beloved is the murderess:

And worke on them as mee, and so preferre
Your murder, to the name of Massacre. 53

Such heartless beloved can devour many lovers. In "A Jeat Ring Sent", the lover says "Thou art not so black, as my heart", the use of world "black" implies that his heart is mournful because of unrequitted love. The inconstancy of the beloved murders him. Black colour does not have different shades like other colours. Consequently, it represents constancy, it also stands for humility and sobriety.

It is not the lover only who can complain of the cruelty of the beloved, the beloved may also have the

similar experience. In "Breake of day", the beloved expresses very sincerely and naturally her exasperation against her "bodyless adversary - 'business'", \(^{54}\) which is "the worst disease of love". \(^{55}\) So, love is not entirely free from such diseases and naturally there are "teare floods" and "sigh tempest". These floods may culminate into a deluge and "overflow" the world of the lover and the beloved. \(^{56}\)

To lessen the possibilities of such deluge, the lover in Donne's poems often shows his liking for the virtues and simplicity in love. Virtuous women are like "Angels" and "nothing can impaire" them. The possibility of virtue attired beauty can not be altogether overruled. Such combination evokes reverence, not sensuality. Moreover, it is free from the bindings of physical presence:

So able men, blest with a vertuous Love,
Remote or neare, or howsoe'r they move:
Their vertue breakes all clouds that might annoy,
There is no Emptinesse, but all is Ioy. \(^{57}\)

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Donne treats beauty-virtue combination as an ideal condition for love. Apart from Elizabeth Drury, whom Donne has presented as perfection in beauty and virtue, Lady Bedford also possesses such combination as she is "embodiment or essence of both virtue and beauty". It appears that Donne valued the Neo-Platonic identity of beauty and virtue.

Donne's images of love, on the whole, form two groups. On the one hand, there are the images that relate to inconstancy in love, free love and physical pleasures. On the other, are the images that show true love which leads to spirituality. In the first group come images from sea, stream, courts, law and they lead to death and disease and the negative aspects of life. The poems of this category such as "Confined Love", use images like "Beasts doe no joyntures lose", or:

...But followes it that I  
Must serve her onely, when I may have choice  
Of other beauties, and in change rejoice?\(^5^9\)

In such love, women are like birds, to be "caught". The argument for such love, as in "Elegie III", is supported by images such as "vast sea" - symbolising death; or by


\(^{5^9}\) "Elegie XVII. Variety", Poetical Works, p. 101.
images of streams which "Never looke backe" after they "kisse one banke, and leaving this". Images such as falling starre", "mandrake roote", "Antedate" etc. also echo the negative aspects of love.

On the other hand, there are images that draw the picture of a different type of love, which depends on mutuality. In poems like "The Extasie", "A Valediction: forbidding mourning", "The good morrow", "Aire and Angels", "The Canonization", to name a few, the poet reflects this mood of faithful and true love. Here body plays its initial role, no doubt, but a sort of transcendence can be traced where physical pleasures are not the ends, they are simply means of achieving the higher bliss of the spiritual love. Once this state is achieved the lovers can remain united even if they are physically far removed from each other. The remarkable images in such poems are of rich "balme", "compasses", "king", "prince", "circle", "intergraft", "mixt soules", "Angels", "map", "gold", "Phoenix", "coin", etc. As already seen in the previous chapter, these images are related to his search for reality. These represent perfection or close affinity to perfection in one or other way. The search for reality goes on at various levels. On

60. "Elegie III. Change", Poetical Works, p. 75.
the broader level he was searching the aim of life, the mysteries behind this universe, and the ultimate reality about soul. But simultaneously he was probing on the intellectual aspect of life as well as emotional aspects. The supreme emotion - love - was what he was contemplating on at the level of emotions and human feelings. In the manner of a scientist he surveyed and experimented with different moods and situations in love and the "quintessence" he found in simplicity and spirituality in love. He was an integrated mind. At the level of love also he transcended from physical to spiritual. What he himself experienced and experimented at the mental level is reflected through his choice of imagery. In love, his choice of imagery has to be linked with his erudite and secular imagery. Such linking will clearly establish the fact that despite showing varying and conflicting attitudes towards love, he was, on the whole, advocating a sort of love which is free from all faithlessness, inconstancy, slavery of physical charms and mere bodily union. It is standing on the firm grounds of body but, all the same, it is breathing in the fresh air of spirituality. Even in those poems where he seems to advocate free love, either through the choice of images he shows the irony behind the argument or there is a turn in thought as, for example, in "Elegie XVII". The poem begins, as its title indicates, with an argument for a variety and change:
The heavens rejoice in motion, why should I
Abjure my so much lov'd variety,
And not with many youth and love divide?
Pleasure is none, if not diversifi'd:61

The idea is further emphasised, among other arguments, by
the advocacy for plurality:

How happy were our Syres in ancient times,
Who held plurality of loves no crime:62

But in the end of the poem the climax averts the whole
arguments; it brings about an antithesis when the speaker
in the poem indirectly gives the cause of his exasperation
- the rarity of "beauty with true worth" - and asserts his
unflinching constancy towards such beauty, if found:

But beauty with true worth securely weighing,
Which being found assembled in some one,
Wee'll love her ever, and love her alone.63

Donne in his vision of love confirms that to be "Inter-
assured of the mind" is the true love; the role of
body is, however, not denied because body is the "book"
where such sublime emotions dwell.

Howsoever glorified the emotion of love may be in
his poems, Donne could never do away with the medieval
idea of the omnipresence of death, disease and decay. Even

62. Ibid., p. 102.
63. Ibid., p. 103.
in his poems of "Vigorous glorification of love", as in "The Canonization" or in divine poems he could not avoid the natural appearance of death and disease imagery. In "The Canonization", for example, he refers to his "palsy", "gout" and "five gray hairs". The lovers are like "tapers" consuming themselves. Reference is made to "Plague bill" as well. Donne's medievalism is as clearly discernible in his insistence on the grave and the narrow margin that he finds between a skeleton and a living being as it has been found in his scholastic reasoning and fondness for other medieval beliefs and practices. The medieval view about the corruptibility of this world presented a deep sense of decay and death. Regarding the medieval concept of the slow decaying of this world, Leishman remarks:

...another medieval conception - was that the world was decaying; that it was running down like a clock; that the seasons were becoming more unfavourable, that men were becoming smaller in stature, weaker in health, more wicked in their ways.65

Thus, death was a common phenomenon in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and haunted the minds of the people. Apart from famines and violence, Donne witnessed the disastrous plagues of 1592-93 and 1625, which resulted in innumerable deaths. The age, when Donne lived, saw death

lurking round every corner. This mark of the calamities of the age is not particular to Donne only, it cast its gloomy shadow on the pages of Webster, Burton and Jeremy Taylor no less than Donne's own. But Donne's experiences of death and disease were still intenser. His father died when he was hardly four. His younger brother died of gaol fever in 1593 at an early age. His uncle Jesper Heywood was prosecuted for being a Jesuit. Further, he witnessed the unfortunate and lamentable end in an abrupt manner, when at the height of glory and fame, of Earl of Essex who was very close to him. In addition, five of his twelve children could not survive the considerable hazards of childhood caused due to the poor financial condition of Donne. All these culminated in the bereavement of his loving wife when he needed her most. Thus, the medieval view of death and disease at the root of this world coupled with his heart breaking personal experiences of death and disease stamp the pages of Donne in form of images.

Donne was so obsessed by the idea of death that he often contemplated over it and found everything beneath the sphere of moon subject to death and decay - slowly wasting like a taper, this earth has "sharpe North" and "declining West". The struggle between man and nature -

each trying to overpower the other — has continued throughout the ages. Man labours hard to have a upper hand but ultimately nature establishes its superiority. Man is nothing but a puppet in the hands of nature as he is "tamed" and "fattened" by nature. This cruelty of nature is shared by the beloved also. The "winde" of "cruelty" from the unresponsive beloved causes "harmes" to the world of the lover and "hastes" his death. These sorrows and sufferings of the lover in "Twicknam Garden" are like "grave frost" and "Benight" the world of love. Anguished and depressed, "Blasted with sighes" and "surrounded with teares" the lover wants to become a "stone fountain weeping out his yeare", so that he may give vent to his endless fountain of tears. His "Spider love" can convert a "Manna" into "gall". The nature metaphors, thus have been employed by the poet to give a vivid picture of death and dissolution.

The medieval concept of slow decay and consumption of this world has been very effectively reflected in the "Anniversaries". If we set aside the occasion of the two poems, their main theme and purpose is to contemplate on this aspect of human world and to suggest the remedy thereof. The girl on whose death anniversary the poems have been written has been presented in such an extraordinary stature that she embodies perfection. Her
death has further intensified the process of deterioration. The poem contains fairly long passages contemplating on this aspect of human life which clearly echoes medieval view. The poet is gloomy to find that "There is no health", "we are never well", our "children come not right, nor orderly" and "so in length is man/Contracted to an inch, who was a spanne". The whole "mankinde decayes" and we are "bedwarfed" in both "minde, and body". 67

Donne's view of the slow wasting of the world is related to his taper images. A burning taper appeared to him symbolic of this slow consumption. A taper wastes itself, is short lived. Our life is like a taper in its transience and slow wasting, so "lifes taper is a snuffe". 68 Thus, it has many similarities with life. The colourful amorous life eventually ends in man's destruction, so a taper also fascinates an amorous fly and seals its destruction:

...so, the tapers beamie eye
Amorously twinkling, beckens the giddie flie,
Yet burns his wings; 69

Even true love can be defined through the metaphor of taper. The true passion is like a taper that burns both

69. "Elegie VI. Oh, let me not serve so", Ibid., p. 79.
the lover and the beloved. This mutual consumption is a mark of perfect union and true love:

Call her one, mee another flye,
We're Tapers too, and at our owne cost die, 70

Donne finds our bodies like wax that melts in the unfavourable conditions of fire and flame. But in true love this melting results in the glorious light of love spreading all round.

This perpetual melting, burning and wasting is omnipresent in this world which is passing through a process of "Wasteful consumption". Consumption suggested him, apart from slow wasting and melting, the idea of languishing. Ships bring the picture of this process of slow wasting, languishing and helplessness of man in the hands of fate:

Or like slacke sinew'd Sampson, his haire off,
Languish our ships. 71

Long voyages appear to Donne like "long consumptions". Sea and ship represent death to him, so are voyages. Even nature, which has always been glorified by most of the poets, could not console Donne. The negative aspects of nature often get a vivid and frequent depiction. Whenever

he thinks of water the image that comes to him is that of
death, treachery and drowning: possibly as a result of his
experiences at sea during the naval expeditions. Even a
river evokes the mental picture of drowning. An inconstant
and flirting mistress is like a river that not only
"drownes" her "meades" but also the "corne o'rfloow". 72 A
mishap in love brings the mental picture of drowning and
swallowing. Such love "swallows us, and never chawes". 73
The process of devouring and drowning goes on endlessly in
nature. The corruption of the law officers, who exploit
the law suitors and swallow their whole property for
safety of which they seek protection of law, remind Donne
of the sea "which drownes them" that go near it.

The medieval sense of decay can be seen in his
images of wounds also. He finds this life "A dangerous
Apostem", its "subtilst immaterial parts" are being
wasted by a "consuming wound". 74 Apart from this sense of
decay, wound also produced a feeling of loathsomeness as
wound is a sort of infection in body. The kisses of a
rival on the lips of his beloved appear like "envenom'd
sore" to the lover. Thus the treachery and faithlessness
may also be depicted through the images of a wound. A few

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73. "The broken heart", Ibid., p. 44.
images of patients also appear in Donne's poems, e.g., in "The Calme", "Pinnaces" - the small ships that go ahead of the main fleet and fail to get help in need because of the distance - appear to Done like "bed-ridde" patients that may die any moment.

Images of diseases are very common in his poetry, secular as well as religious. The largest number of such images that one discovers in him are of fever and dropsy. Images of fever particularly echo his personal experiences of the disease in his family. The year 1613 brought serious illness for him and his family. Again in November 1623 he fell seriously ill with relapsing fever. He wrote to Mrs. Cockain:

I am come now, not only to pay a fever every half-year, as a Rent for my life; but I am called upon before the day, and they come sooner in the year than heretofore.75

Donne has written a whole poem on fever. Fever evoked in his mind the image of wasting, burning and consuming. The "burning fits" of fever may "seize" the beloved like fire:

O wrangling schooles, that search what fire
Shall burne this world, had none the wit
Unto this knowledge to aspire,
That this her fever might be it?76

Fever also suggests the idea of restlessness and obsession. Thus "sick Ireland" expressed her rage against Elizabeth I "like to an Ague" and needed cure. Here "Ague" evokes the image of mental illness and obsession. Similarly high ambitions are like "Calentures"—self destructive delerium caused by tropical fever. Excessive zeal may also cause an "ague", even the knowledge of this world "kindles Calentures in some" 77 poor brains.

Images of dropsy are no less frequent in Donne. The immoderate thirst associated with dropsy brings it close to fever. It brings a sense of loathsomeness rather than pain. Donne often uses this metaphor to show his dislike. The lover who is spied and detected by the father of his mistress is "hydroptique father". Donne shows his dislike for the Dutch by calling them "spongy hydroptique". The metaphor "hydroptique" also functions to show immoderate desires and covetousness. Thus the excess of avarice is also "hydroptique". Hydropsy attracted Donne because it provided a real life illustration to body turning to liquid. However, dropsy is not altogether negative, it has positive usage as well. Donne's frequent use of death and disease images almost animates them and makes them a part of life and their harshness is often subsided. The

77. "To Sr Edward Herbert at Julyers. Man is a lumpe", Poetical Works, p. 172.
"Health" of the soul depends on its being "Hydroptique" of "Gods safe-sealing Bowle",\textsuperscript{78} i.e., a drop of Christ's blood. The desire to have affinity with God is very aptly expressed through this metaphor in "Holy Sonnet XVII", written on the death of his wife Ann:

But though I have found thee, and thou my thirst hast fed,
A holy thirsty dropse melts mee yet.\textsuperscript{79}

Dropsy reminds Donne of sponges for their power to absorb and ooze out fluid exceeded. It has been seen that he calls the Dutch "spongy hydroptique". Even parts of the body are assimilated to sponges - "spongie eyes" or "spungie liver".\textsuperscript{80}

Images of "palsie" and "gout" also appear in his poetry. Palsie is the outer symptom of an inner disorder. Thus, inner disorder and loss of equilibrium in a clock is reflected by its hands that get "shaking palsies". Gout can represent, as in "Elegie XI", the decaying and consuming age - "poore and gouty age". His experiences of the two plagues bring some metaphors of plague such as "plaguie Bill", "plague of travellers", etc. In those days ships were the greatest conveyers of plague so he finds it the disease of "travellers".

\textsuperscript{78} "The second Anniversarie", Poetical Works, p. 228.
\textsuperscript{79} "Holy Sonnet. XVII. Since she whom I lov'ed", Ibid., p. 301.
\textsuperscript{80} "The Progresse of the Soule", Ibid., p. 287.
Among other diseases, the "Lust-bred diseases" remind him of itching, as they are results of "Itching desire". Lustful desires are thus, "rank, itchie lust"; they produce an "itchie warmth" that results in our degeneration. Perhaps it was the "itchie" nature of the French that Donne held responsible for the "Frenche disease", which causes "their naturall Countreys rot".\(^{81}\) The youthful sexual desires are also defined by the metaphor of disease in "Elegie IX" as they are "fever wishes pestilence". The impact of disease on Donne is so deep that even falling in love appears to him to be a disease - love is "as subtilly catch'd, as a disease".\(^{82}\) The infectious nature of the disease brings it near love. On the whole, Donne's disease images define the seamy side of life. As the diseases result in deterioration of health, so the vices result in decay and degeneration of mankind. 

Mental illness also supplies some effective images to Donne. Lunacy suggests him a picture of a self-centered, self-conceited and melancholic man rather than that of a violent and irresponsible man. This self-indulgence makes the person blind towards his surroundings. Thus, a proud beloved fails to understand

\(^{81}\) "Elegie XI. The Bracelet", Poetical Works, p. 86.  
\(^{82}\) "Elegie XIV. The Expostulation", Ibid., p. 98.
the sincerity of the lover and shows her indifference. But this self-conceitedness is undue and unjust:

Vaine lunatique, against these scapes I could Dispute, and conquer, if I would.\textsuperscript{83}

The superiority complex of the French and their hatred for the English appears to Donne the result of their "lunatique giddiness". It is the eccentricity or obsession of a person that brings him near lunacy. Donne pretends to be so in his poem "The Will", when he bequeathes his various faculties and senses to people who already have excess of them. The poet speaks here with his tongue in cheek: what he really intends is to laugh at those who have the qualities in excess and thereby wants to tell the beloved that because of her indifference he has become lunatic and is making his will. Lunacy to Donne, does not mean that much of physical illness as the intellectual bankruptcy or myopia.

In one of his poems, viz. "The Legacie", Donne asserts, "I felt mee dye". His personal experience of death was, undeniably, so close that he could really feel himself die. Quite naturally, he often contemplates over this aspect of life, and even the most joyous moments, in love or in religious contemplation, can not escape being

\textsuperscript{83} "Woman's constancy", Poetical Works, p. 9.
overshadowed by death. Even sincerity in love finds death
metaphor:

It kill'd mee againe, that I who still was true,
In life, in my last Will should cozen you.84

His keen observation and vivid memories of a dying
person are discernible when he picturises death. Since a
dying man's concern contracts to the limits of his own
bed, "to the beds-feet, life is shrunke", the other
meaning may be that the preserving moisture of a dying man
drains from his back towards the earth via the feet of the
bed. The death of the beloved ruins the world of the
lover and leaves him to "absence, darknesse, and death".
The lover himself has "shrunken" to absolute "nothingnesse".
He is converted into love's "grave". His "spring" is
dead; his sun is "spent"; his "sap" and "balm" is sunk;
and his day is converted into a "long night". Since sun
rays are "spent", in their place only "light squads" are
coming from stars as these are no constant "rayes".85

In "Elegie I" he again picturises a dying, jealous
husband who has been deserted by his wife. It presents a
painful agonised death of the husband with his "kindreds
howling cries;/ Begging with few feign'd teares, great
legacies":

85. "A nocturnall upon S. Lucies day. Being the
shortest day", Ibid., pp. 39-41.
If swolne with poysone, hee lay in his last bed,  
His body with a serue-banke covered,  
Drawing his breath, as thick and short, as can  
The nimblest crocheting Musitian,  
Ready with loathsome vomiting to spue...\textsuperscript{86}

Donne often brings images of the agents of death.  
Death has employed various agents to devour human beings.  
The medieval view of this world coupled with his own  
suffering made him contemplate on various aspects and  
reasons of death. So he lists the agents of death in "Holy  
Sonnet VII":

\textit{All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthow}  
\textit{All whom warre, death, age, agues, tyrannies,}  
\textit{Despaire, law, chance hath slaine}...\textsuperscript{87}

The list sums up the possible reasons of death, most of  
these harsh realities of life he had personally  
experienced. In another poem "Elegie V" the speaker is  
going to the battlefield and he is afraid that he might be  
killed in the war. Donne was aware of the precariousness  
and dangers associated with war. The speaker tells his  
beloved that in battlefield he may be converted into  
"shadows". Even if he comes back he may be "weather  
beaten", his hands "oares torne", his face "tann'd" by sun  
beams and his body may remain merely "sack" of "broken"  
bones with "blue staines" of gunpowder on his skin.\textsuperscript{88} Thus

\textsuperscript{86} "Elegie I. Jealousie", \textit{Poetical Works}, p. \textsuperscript{71}.
\textsuperscript{87} "Holy Sonnet VII. At the round earths imagin'd corners", \textit{Ibid.}, p. \textsuperscript{296}.
\textsuperscript{88} "Elegie V. His Picture", \textit{Ibid.}, pp. \textsuperscript{77} f.
war is one of the most powerful agents of death. Donne's was the time when wars were a part of life, hence, such images come to him in a natural way. We have already noticed that sea, ship and voyages also bring pictures of death in Donne's mind. Even old age brings the picture of death as old faces are "Deaths-heads". Vandals and Goths are the living representations of death and destruction. They embody death with its sharp claws, horror and are ready to drown us in death:

Should againe the revenous
Vandals and Goths inundate us

Donne finds death a "mighty bird of prey", who "breaks off our friends, and lets us peacemeale rot". Everything on this earth is subject to death. The earth itself is like its dining table:

The earths face is but thy Table: there are set Plants, cattell, men, dishes for Death to eate.
In a rude hunger now hee millions drawes
Into his bloody, or plaguy, or sterv'd jawes.

Death, which unties the bonds of flesh and blood, is the reality at the physical level. Its power is unlimited. Even the most powerful men on earth such as kings and emperors have to succumb to it. The realisation of the terror and torture associated with death makes even the most courageous and hard-hearted persons tremble. Even

the most unflinching:

...Athisets at their dying houre
Call, what they cannot name, an unknowne power, 91

In "The second Anniversarie" there are many images that call for a contemplation on death as it is the ultimate reality, and the most virtuous lady like Elizabeth Drury could not escape it.

Donne's age witnessed a transition from medieval to modern and many scholars like him were trying to find their position in this state of transition. Donne, despite being a renaissance scholar, believed in medieval theories as well. If the renaissance thinking glorified man the medieval belief centred on the insignificance of man and the corruptibility of this world. Donne shared the latter thought also. This shows the complexity of his mind that Donne was both medieval and modern.

Images of death that appear recurrently in his poems mark two fold effect of death on him. On the one hand they show his obsession about death, on the other, they attempt to minimise the pain and fear associated with it. The themes of many of his poems is death. Leaving aside the "Epicedes and Obsequies", the "Anniversaries",

and religious poems, where he often talks of death a major part of his love poetry too is overshadowed by death images. He often imagines himself as dead. The basic idea behind imagining death is to minimise the torture, terror and coldness of it. Though in jest, the lover in his poem wants to have a rehearsal of the unavertible reality of death. In one of his poems viz. "Song" he reveals through an apt image that the reason behind imagining death is to minimise the sharpness of its claws. The image, apart from meeting the argument in the poem, ensures the sincerity and truthfulness of the lover. The idea of becoming lifeless at the time of parting indicates the true love between the lover and the beloved. So the speaker feigns death:

But since that I
Must dye at last, 'tis best,
To use my selfe in jest
Thus by fain'd deaths to dye. 

 Donne can contemplate on death and imagine himself dying with complete objectivity. In "The second Anniversarie"

92. Out of fifty five Songs and Sonnets as many as eleven poems are on the theme of death. In six poems: "The Legacie", "The Apparition", "The Will", "The Relique", "The Dampe", and "The Computation" he imagines himself dying or dead long back. In two poems: "A nocturnall upon S. Lucies day, Being the shortest day", and "The Dissolution", he imagines his beloved as dead. In "The Funerall" he addresses those who will "shroud" him. In "The Expiration" he expresses his desire to die; whereas in "The Paradox" he wittily regards himself as dead because love slays those who are in love and the poet also being in love is dead long back.

we have a fairly long contemplation on death:

    Thynke thee laid on thy death-bed, loose and slacke; 
    And thynke that, but unbinding of a packe, 
    To take one precious thing, thy soule from thence. 
    Thynke thy self... 94

In "Holy Sonnet VI" he again imagines himself dying when "gluttonous death" is ready to "unjoynt" his body and soul. This desire to minimise the effect of death can also be seen in the image of death as a groom that "brings a Taper to the outward roome". 95 The colossalness of Donne's imagination crosses the limits of death. Even if he imagines himself die, he can not imagine an ordinary death, rather he would like to embrace a momentous death, almost like that of Christ. This desire might have originated from the fear of sin which is his another obsession, and still it also reflects his ambitious nature and immensity of imagination. He says:

Spit on my face you Jewes, and pierce my side 
Buffet, and scoffe, scourge, and crucifie mee, 
For I have sinn'd, and sinn'd, and onely hee, 
Who could do no iniquitie, hath dyed: 
But by my death can not be satisfied 
My sinnes, which passe the Jewes impiety: 
They kill'd once an inglorious man, but I 
Crucifie him daily, being now glorified. 96

His religious poetry often contemplates on death in relation to sin and salvation, which happens to be the theme of the next chapter.

95. Ibid., p. 229. 
Capital punishments and executions at public places were very common in the age of Donne. But Donne's experience of death was so frequent and keen that even the ghastliest form of death has received enlivening treatment at his hand. The account of an immediately executed man in "The second Anniversarie" is shocking but fascinating. His head being chopped off blood is sprouting from the head and from the trunk flow "two Red seas", yet:

His eyes will twinkle, and his tongue will roll,  
As though he beckned, and cal'd backe his soule,  
He grasps his hands, and he pulls up his feet,  
And seems to reach, and to step forth to meet  
His soule;  

The blood sprouting from the body of the executed man reminds Donne of sea, which is symbol of death and destruction. Donne's images are drawn from various fields but the remarkable thing about them is the unity of meaning that they aim at, as in this poem also.

Related to death are images of dead bodies, worms, putrification, sepulchre and graves. Such images are common in Donne. The two "Anniversaries" are teeming with such images. This world appears as a "carkasse" to the poet:

The world is but a carkasse; Thou art fed
By it, but as a worme, that carkasse bred: 98

In another poem he finds human beings as mere carcasses. Their virtues being dead and sins increased, they are doomed to rot like a dead body. Thus our "Cities are Sepulchers; they who dwell there/ Are carceses". 99 The overcrowded cities are inhabited by the insignificant human beings who are devoid of any spiritual attainment. Their day to day business brings them close to nests of ants busy in trifles and transitory achievements. This is, spiritually, a state of lifelessness. Such cities evoke a mental picture of "Church-yards" in Donne. Our sinful deeds are like worms that eat up and contaminate our souls and deprive them of their divine seat. If we do not abstain from sins "Our soules become worme-eaten Carkasses". 100 A carcass breeds worms and feeds them. The very sight of worms produces a creeping sensation. Donne speaks of "corrupt wormes", "parasites", "wormes meat" and "worme-eaten" bodies a number of time. These are all symbols of death and decay and remind the poet of the fact that howsoever noble, mighty and great one may be during his lifetime but once dead one is doomed to rot and be

eaten up by "corrupt wormes". Our sinful nature may kill our divine virtues and thus we may also turn into living carcasses being eaten up by our sins. This is a pathetic anticlimax of human life. The ultimate reality of human body lies in being eaten up by wormes. The law officers who like "wormes" eat up the law suitors, ultimately shall be eaten up by worms - "For they do eate you now, whose selves wormes shall eate". 101

Images of graves also occur in his poems. Graves evoke a sense of ugliness, repulsion and lifelessness. The breasts of an ugly woman are then "worme eaten trunkes", they are living "grave". "Wrinkles" on the face of the beloved appear to Donne like "loves graves". So much so that the body of an unmarried girl appears a "grave" to him.

His images of tombs and coffins reveal the "isolated and frustrated" 102 self of the poet. He finds human body a "brittle shell", a "living Tombe". 103 The decks of a ship are "Alters" where the travellers are to be buried.

Donne's obsession about death and disease reveals

the reality at the level of body and the physical world. He realised that a man cannot escape these harsh realities. However, his search for a solution went on: his poems epitomise his quest for such solution. He repeatedly tried to show that love is a superior force, beyond all decay and corruption. But this solution seems a distant dream in this physical world. Death overpowers the body of a man when he most wants to enjoy this life. Death renders one benefit also, i.e., to cause "Soules deliverie".\textsuperscript{104} Death, decay and disease all are associates of the body and the physical world. All our intellectual gains and scientific progress fail to win over death. Hence, some higher and sublimer solution is required and the search for it continues in Donne's poetry.

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