PANDORA’S BOX

THOUGHTS ON HEALTH AND ILLNESS IN POETIC LITERATURE

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IN A LETTER to B. R. Haydon, written in 1817, Keats refers to his ‘horrid morbidity of temperament which has shown itself at intervals’, but adds, ‘every ill has its share of good; this very bane would at any time enable me to look with an obstinate eye on the Devil himself’. I happened to read these words at a time when I was considering how to meet the challenge with which the promoters of the John Keats Memorial Lecture have so pleasantly honoured me this evening. As the first medical man to give this lecture I have chosen to consider how the creation of poetry has been influenced by the experience and contemplation of illness, enabling its practitioners ‘to look with an obstinate eye’ on that Devil. And while seeing how poets refer to and respond to illness, I shall try also to show how they treat its antithesis, health; for this, too, was a subject on which Keats held strong views, as we may judge from his not altogether original (or altogether serious) comment in a letter to J. H. Reynolds: ‘Banish money—banish sofas—banish wine—banish music—but right Jack Health, honest Jack Health, true Jack Health—banish health and banish all the world’.

The Greeks realized the truth of this when they created the myth of Pandora. Zeus, in his anger at Prometheus’ theft of fire for men, sent among them a woman of supreme beauty but deceitful nature, called Pandora because she had received a gift from each of the gods. In her hands she carried a jar. To quote Hesiod¹: ‘The tribes of men lived on earth remote and free from ills and hard toil and heavy sickness . . . but the woman took off the great lid of the jar with her hands and scattered all these, and her thought caused sorrow and mischief to men’; after that, ‘countless plagues wander amongst men . . . diseases come upon men continually by day and by night’; only Hope remained under the lid of the jar. In the ancient world disease, like other misfortunes, was often regarded as a punishment for some disobedience to divine commands, as when the Egyptians were struck down with festering boils because Pharaoh would not release the Israelites. When Job was smitten with a similar disease this was revealed by the poet to be Satan’s work and also God’s test of Job’s character—though the comforters saw it as a sign of God’s displeasure and a proof

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that Job had sinned. The great dramatic and poetic force of the Book of Job owes much to this misunderstanding. In the myth of Pandora the association of man's chief delight with his greatest misfortune is an intensely poetic symbol; but the human situation which gives it this power is the influence of a beautiful woman, not the conflict of health and disease. When we examine the polarity of health and disease in the writings of poets we find little to suggest that it creates a dramatic or poetic tension such as that created by the conflict of good and evil, or of truth and falsehood. Indeed, the word 'health' is no favourite of the poets; when personified it can have embarrassing overtones, as in Thomas Parnell's Eclogue on Health:

Come, gentle Goddess! Come; nor thou suffice,
But bring thy mountain sister, Exercise.

This unheroic quality is not surprising, for health is not, perhaps, the true antithesis of disease, as good is of evil, but merely the norm from which disease is a deviation. There is (or should be) no war between the healthy and the unhealthy, as there is between the good and the wicked, for all men desire health. It is ironical, too, that words denoting what men desire most—'health', 'peace', even 'goodness'—carry overtones that offend some instinct and put the poetic muse on her guard. D. H. Lawrence expressed the probable reason for this in memorable words:

People always make war when they say they love peace . . .
Loud peace propaganda makes war seem imminent.

Health becomes a subject of poetry when seen in relation to sickness. For example, in Blake's poem 'O rose, thou art sick', we see health not as a bonus or 'optional extra' that comes of a balanced diet and regular exercise, but as life in its true perfection, the Rose. Health recovered after illness may also be seen in this light, as though a door usually shut were briefly opened on to the incredible reality. A poetic parallel, on a slighter scale, to Beethoven's famous thanksgiving after recovery is Christopher Smart's Hymn to the Supreme Being on Recovery from a Severe Fit of Illness, in which he says:

But soul-rejoicing health again returns,
The blood meanders gentle in each vein,
The lamp of life renew'd with vigour burns,
And exiled reason takes her seat again.

Sickness, of course, can have its consolations. Edward Thomas notes that his eye can travel four miles at a leap, while his body can scarcely leap four yards; the best and worst of it is never to know, yet to imagine gloriously, pure health:
For had I health I could not ride or run or fly
So far or so rapidly over the land
As I desire: I should reach Wiltshire tired;
I should have changed my mind before
I could be in Wales.

George Herbert, on recovery from sickness, wrote in his most paradoxical vein:

When I got health, thou took'st away my life,
for the 'life' which he cherished was that of the spirit, and physical illness helped him to see it more clearly; and he continues:

Yet lest, perchance, I should too happie be
In my unhappinesse,
Turning my purge to food, Thou throwest me
Into more sicknesses.

Curiously reminiscent of Keats's pained sense on hearing the nightingale, Herbert's lines present no 'hygienic' view of life, though certainly one that is poetic.

Public health and the prevention of illness are subjects which are, perversely, more exciting to the 'stuffed owl' than to the poetic muse.

'Descend from heaven, Urania'—the opening of Paradise Lost, Book II—is sublime; 'inoculation, heavenly maid, descend'—a phrase that appeared in an Oxford prize poem—is unforgettably bad. A more skilful, if less academic, poet, Robert Bloomfield, admitted that Dr. Jenner's 'discovery' had 'generally and almost unexceptionally appeared a subject . . . peculiarly unfit for poetry'; nevertheless, in Good Tidings he disregarded his own precept and produced a long poem on smallpox vaccination in which Jenner's triumph is celebrated:

Forth sped the truth immediate from his hand,
And confirmations sprung in ev'ry land;
In every land, on beauty's lily arm,
On infant softness, like a magic charm,
Appeared the gift that conquers as it goes;
The dairy's boast, the simple, saving Rose.

The rose, in this case, being a cowpox lesion! As the father of a lame child and an invalid himself, Bloomfield wrote with compassion about illness, and his invocation of health in Shooter's Hill is tinged with melancholy. In an introduction to that poem he writes 'sickness may be often an incentive to poetical composition'.

The truth of that observation is borne out by the large amount of pathological subject matter in the writings of the poets. Lucretius spells out the clinical detail of many diseases. Of a man with epilepsy
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he says (in Latham's translation): 'He groans and trembles in every joint. He raves. He contracts his muscles. He writhes. He gasps convulsively. He tires his limbs with tossing. The cause of the foaming is that the force of the disease, dispersed through the limbs, dislodges the vital spirit and lashes it to spray, as the wild wind's fury froths the salt sea waves'; from which he argues, 'when mind and spirit in the body itself are a prey to such violent maladies... how can you believe them capable of surviving apart from the body, in the open air, with the wild winds for company?' Whether or not such a philosophy is to our taste, the expression of it is a fine flight of poetry.

Early epics and poetic dramas abound in the description of wounds. One of the most poignant of these is Sophocles' drama on Philoctetes, the great archer of the Greeks in the Trojan War, who was put in isolation on the island of Lemnos because of a festering, unhealed wound, which meant, for his companions,

... no peace at sacrifice
Or at libations, but the whole camp rang
With his discordant screams...

Usually trauma is presented as an incident of the battlefield or in a private brawl. Sometimes it is presented with wit or humour—for example, Thomas Randolph's thoughts on the loss of his little finger, which are at the opposite extreme from Sophocles' musings on the tragic fate of Philoctetes:

Arithmetic nine digits and no more
Admits of; then I still have all my store:
For what mischance hath ta'en from my left hand
It seems did only for a cipher stand.

This is an exercise of wit rather than poetry. In an epigram on the passion of Christ, however, Randolph creates a true metaphysical vision of darkness at noon, concluding: 'Nature must needs be sick when God can die.' But the dividing line between comic and tragic is often narrow in the metaphysical poets, even when they deal with sickness and death, and the same mood is recaptured by many modern writers.

Wasting diseases—tuberculosis, anaemia, cancer—are a familiar subject of romantic fiction and opera; poets seem to have been less openly involved—though in Keats's poetry the involvement was profound. Sometimes the poet's involvement—like Randolph's in the loss of his finger—does not rise above wit, at which level it is often most effective. Thomas Carew, for example, was much possessed with the 'green sickness', that anaemia which used to affect young beauties and give them a special poignancy. For one sufferer from the complaint, Mistress N, he wrote:
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Stay, coward blood, and do not yield
To thy pale sister, beauties' field,
Who there, displaying round her white
Ensignes, hath usurp'd thy right.

Mistress Katherine Nevill, suffering from the same illness, he addresses with a similar mixture of military and amatory encouragement. Two songs, one 'To my mistris, I burning in love', the other 'To her againe, she burning in a fever', give further scope for Carew's wit:

Now she burns as well as I,
Yet my heart can never die;
She burnes, that never knew desire,
She that was ice, she now is fire.

Sometimes the pursuit of such ideas leads the poet to absurdity, and to surprising insensibility, as when Dryden writes, Upon the Death of Lord Hastings from Smallpox:

Each little pimple had a tear in it,
To wail the fault its rising did commit.

At the opposite extreme from these verbal balancing feats are the sentimental musings of Kirke White (whom Byron praised) in his Sonnet to Consumption:

Gently, most gently, on thy victim's head,
Consumption, lay thine hand! Let me decay
Like the expiring lamp.

Consumption fares as badly, when personified, as does Health—or Exercise! Thomas Hardy aptly personifies sickness as one who 'bears our little ark no spite' but is 'bidden to enter there'. A successful presentation of chronic sickness without personification is by the 9th Century Chinese master, Po Chüi. On being visited by a friend during illness, he writes (in Waley's translation):

I have been ill so long that I do not count the days;
At the southern window, evening—and again evening.
Sadly chirping in the grasses under my eaves
The winter sparrows morning and evening sing.
By an effort I rise and lean heavily on my bed;
Tottering I step towards the door of the courtyard.
By chance I meet a friend who is coming to see me . . .
Tranquil talk was better than any medicine;
Gradually the feelings came back to my numbed heart.

Nothing could be further from this unemphatic miniature than the complexity of Shakespeare's insights into disease, though both are full
of compassion and lack sentimental exaggeration. King Lear, cast out by his daughters to the mercy of the storm and his own bursting fury, utters some of the unforgettable truths about suffering and sickness:

Thou think'st ’tis much that this contentious storm
Invades us to the skin; so ’tis to thee;
But where the greater malady is fix’d
The lesser is scarce felt . . . when the mind’s free
The body’s delicate.

On reflection, we can see that these truths are self-evident and could be paraphrased in words that would not impress us with their insight; but Shakespeare’s language has given them a prophetic vividness: as it does in the doctor’s words from Macbeth:

. . . infected minds
To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets:
More needs she the divine than the physician.

After Shakespeare’s, no voice sounds quite right except, perhaps, that of Milton at his best; and he too struck a rare vein of poetry from the experience of disease—in particular, from the blindness which was his personal tragedy. For Lear, the lesser malady was unfelt in presence of the greater; for Milton, the loss of sight, the experience

Of Nature’s works to me expunged and ras’d
And wisdome at one entrance quite shut out

found some redress in the experience of spiritual vision:

So much the rather thou Celestial Light
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate.

More poignant and no less majestic is the sonnet describing a dream in which his dead wife was brought back to him; but—

. . . as to embrace her I enclined,
I waked, she fled, and day brought back my night.

Samson Agonistes, another poem about blindness, would hardly have been written but for Milton’s affliction.

Why was the sight
To such a tender ball as the eye confined?

and he bewails his fate ‘to live a life half dead, a living death, and buried’.
The aspect of disease which haunts these great poems is the suffering that it causes and the mechanisms by which the body and mind adjust themselves to such distress, even rising to new powers and insights. Disease of the mind has exercised an even greater fascination over poets, perhaps because it holds up to them a sort of mirror in which they see, objectively, the results of what was considered to be a demonic possession. The inspired utterances of the poet, the prophet, and the oracle had something in common with the ravings of the maniac—the replacement of normal controlled activity of the mind by something more powerful and seemingly extraneous. In the poet this was often accepted as some kind of validation of its aesthetic authenticity. 'Great wits are sure to madness near allied', wrote Dryden. Michael Drayton, in a tribute to Marlowe, was even more explicit:

For that fine madnesse he did still maintain  
Which rightly should possess a poet's brain.

Shakespeare used similar language:

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven.

Such associations drew respect, even awe, to madness itself: as when the Cumaean Sibyl, in the sixth book of the Aeneid, 'ran furious riot in the cave, as if in hope of casting the God's power from her brain; yet all the more did he torment her frantic countenance, overmastering her wild thoughts, and crushed her and shaped her to his will'. It was the mad Ophelia and the mad King Lear who, between ravings, uttered some of Shakespeare's profoundest and most startling flashes of truth, and Lear's fool, aping madness, was privileged to speak unpalatable truths with impunity.

Speculations on the abnormality of the artist by Cesare Lombroso, J. F. Nisbet, Max Nordau, and others at the end of the 19th century took the opposite line of classifying the artist as a diseased or degenerate type, whose work they rejected because of its morbid traits. Most of these critics were doctors, and their terms of reference were medical rather than aesthetic; their revulsion was directed against the deliberate cult of decadence which was then fashionable. Today their theories are not accepted, though they might seem more relevant to some of the artistic developments of the 1960s than to the fin de siècle art of the 1890s against which they were aimed.

Doctors, from Asklepios to Sigmund Freud, have been a subject of interest to poets, and the treatment (as distinct from prevention) of illness has been a source of inspiration. In the Agamemnon of Aeschylus there is a reference to the tradition that Zeus killed Asklepios, the god of healing, for restoring the dead to life; the healer here playing
a role similar to that of Prometheus the bringer of fire. But the healing art, like the gift of fire, remained with man. In the Trojan War, when Menelaus was wounded Agamemnon sent for the physician Machaon, son of the great Asklepios; in the words of Homer6, 'when they reached the spot where red-haired Menelaus lay wounded, with all the chieftains gathered round him in a circle, the admirable Machaon passed through the ring, went up to him and at once extracted the arrow from the fastened belt, though the pointed barbs broke off as the head was pulled out. Then he undid the glittering belt, the corslet underneath, and the apron that the coppersmiths had made. When he found the place where the sharp point had pierced the flesh, he sucked out the blood and skilfully applied a soothing ointment from the supply with which the friendly Cheiron had equipped his father.'

Camoens7, in his epic about Vasco da Gama's voyage, gives a vivid account of scurvy among the crew: 'It attacked first the mouth and gums, leaving them all swollen and distorted, and as the flesh swelled it rotted . . . We had no skilled doctor with us, still less a practised surgeon. Those who had the slightest inkling of the art set to, cutting away the poisoned flesh as if it were dead; and well they might, for a man stricken with the disease was as good as a corpse already.' Prevention rather than surgery was seen to be the answer three hundred years later, when George Eliot8 wrote:

... heroic breasts—
Breathing bad air, run risk of pestilence,
Or lacking lime juice when they cross the Line
May languish with the scurvy.

Looking back again, the physician was respected by Chaucer. In the Canterbury Tales the 'Doctour of Phisik' was a man of worth:

In al this world ne was there noon hym like,
To speke of phisik and of surgerye;
For he was grounded in astronomye.

Surprising grounds, perhaps, for his professional status! But

He knew the cause of everich maladye,
Were it of hoot, or cold, or moyste, or drye,
And where engendred and of what humour . . .

Though richly dressed, he was thrifty, and kept his gold for times of pestilence,

For gold in phisik is a cordial
Therefore he lovede gold in special.
Thomas Tusser, in his *Points of Huswifry* published in 1558, recommends the housewife to ‘ask Medicus counsel ere med’cine ye take’ but adds:

> Though thousands hate physik because of the cost,  
> Yet thousands it helpeth, that else should be lost.

An early sidelight on the economics of private practice! Contrast Swift’s tribute to his physician, Arbuthnot, ‘who knew his Art, but not the Trade’. Ben Jonson’s mistrust of a ‘Doctor-Empiric’ is recorded in an epigram addressed to the doctor, which recalls the ancient tradition of presenting a cock to Aesculapius when one had been cured of a dangerous disease, and adds:

> Let me give two, that doubly am set free  
> From my diseases’s danger, and from thee.

Abraham Cowley, who qualified as a doctor, spoke with professional knowledge and with censorious undertones in his pindaric ode to Dr. Scarborough:

> Feavers so hot that one might say  
> Thou migt'st as soon Hell-fires allay . . .  
> Thou dost so temper, that we find  
> Like Gold the Body but refined . . .

And of the doctor whose gift it was to make ‘Life long and Art but short’, he praised him as one who was ‘free from the Physitian’s frequent Maladie, Fantastick Incivilitie’. By contrast, Crashaw seems to discourage the patient from seeking medical advice, referring him rather to Nature’s curative powers:

> That which makes us have no need  
> Of physick, that’s Physick indeed.  
> Hark hither, Reader! Wilt thou see  
> Nature her own physitian be?

George Crabbe, who was apprenticed to a surgeon for four years, spoke with knowledge of doctors:

> Helpers of men they’re called, and we confess  
> Theirs the deep study, theirs the lucky guess: . . .  
> Men who suppress their feelings, but who feel  
> The painful symptoms they delight to heal.

Praising the worth and excellence of the true physician, he notes, however, that some achieve fame without learning, and some write and publish their work ‘to exalt them in the public view’.
In our own time, W. H. Auden, the son of a doctor, condoned the flaws he recognized in another physician of his time, the great Sigmund Freud, whose death he laments:

If some traces of the autocratic pose,
The paternal strictness he distrusted, still
clung to his utterance and features,
it was a protective coloration.

W. E. Henley expressed a more unclouded veneration for the doctor who treated him in hospital:

We hold him for another Herakles,
Battling with custom, prejudice, disease,
As once the son of Zeus with Death and Hell.

But who could have felt otherwise about this doctor, whose name was Joseph Lister?

Repellant as reminders of suffering and death, and yet gracious in their function of healing, hospitals have exercised an ambivalent fascination on the minds of some poets. ‘Life’, said Baudelaire, ‘is a hospital in which every patient is possessed by the desire of changing his bed: one would prefer to suffer near the fire, and another is certain that he would get well if he were by the window.’ To Henley, hospital was a place ‘half workhouse and half jail’, in which

The gaunt brown walls
Look infinite in their decent meanness;

and where

The patients yawn
Or lie as in training for shroud and coffin.

To Walter de la Mare, hospital was

The Inn at the Cross Roads,
Sign of the Rising Sun, of the World’s End,
in which the landlord, welcoming a newly arrived guest, mutters,

Gloomy our stairs of stone, obscure the portal;
Burdened the air with a breath from the further shore;
Yet in our courtyard plays an invisible fountain,
Ever flowers unfading nod at the door.

To J. E. Flecker, hospital was a house of tranquillity. Speaking as a patient, he wrote:
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Would I might be like this, without the pain,
For seven years . . .
Lie here and watch the walls . . .
And served by an old woman, calm and clean,
Her misted face familiar, yet unknown,
Who comes in silence, and departs unseen.

Some of the poets who wrote with peculiar clarity about hospital and illness have themselves been afflicted with severe illness, and a few have been doctors as well. A remarkable instance was the American doctor-poet, K. D. Beernink, who died of leukaemia in 1969: his book, Ward Rounds®, written during his last year in hospital, contains many acute and some deeply moving glimpses of the sick, expressed in a strangely terse, relaxed, varied, and unsentimental diction. In each poem one particular patient and his illness are recalled, as in the lines entitled Traumatic Decortication, about a patient with head injury kept alive on a Bird respirator:

Always the blinds were pulled down in your room, where you waited,
Patient as a pupa, for a diaper change or a turn
Onto last week's bedsore. Your sightless eyes would burn
White in the dark while your soul crouched in the corner.

Monthly that winter your mother came and repeated
Her conviction that you 'would soon be looking better,'
And proudly remembered the gooks you'd killed before
The shrapnel buried your mind in Asia's mud.

For a year synthetic life had been pumped into your blood
Through dozens of tubes. Each day the residents
Were pleased to see your heart and lungs were clear —
Organs serving no intelligence.

Then one morning we found your BIRD unplugged.
The corner,
was empty. I opened the blinds. Spring was near.

I have, so far, confined my attention to writers of verse; but the borderline between poetic and non-poetic literature is indistinct, and there is much excellent poetry in the classics of prose fiction and drama. Among the latter, Anton Tchekov's plays, with their dreamlike clarity and their sense of conveying much more than is actually said, hold a special place. Tchekov practised medicine and said that this had an important influence on his literary work. In a letter to G. I. Rossolino he writes: 'It [medicine] enlarged the sphere of my observation, and
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enriched me with knowledge, the true value of which for me as a writer can only be understood by one who is himself a doctor'. He adds that a knowledge of medicine and a familiarity with science helped him to avoid making many mistakes. To A. S. Souvorin, he writes: 'You advise me not to hunt after two hares . . . I feel more confident and more satisfied with myself when I reflect that I have two professions and not one. Medicine is my lawful wife and literature is my mistress. When I get tired of one I spend the night with the other. Though it's disorderly it's not dull, and besides, neither of them loses anything from my infidelity. If I did not have my medical work, I doubt if I would have given my leisure and spare thoughts to literature.'

There have been many doctor poets, among them Thomas Lodge, Thomas Campion, Vaughan, Akenside, Schiller, Keats, Beddoes, Bridges, and William Carlos Williams. Some have shown the influence of their medical work in their writings. Campion, for example, often used imagery of wounds, madness, and cures in the poems he wrote after qualifying, but not in those he wrote before. It is questionable whether the poetic quality of his writing was enriched by this influence; though the later poems are full of shrewd observations on human behaviour, one cannot assume that he would have been any less observant if he had not been a doctor.

For Bridges, a call to the bedside of a sick child brought a moving and unforgettable image of rigor mortis:

Thy hand clasps, as 'twas wont, my finger and holds it:
But the grasp is the clasp of Death, heartbreaking and stiff;
Yet feels to my hand as if
'Twas still thy will, thy pleasure and trust that enfolds it.

Another contemporary describes the surgeon's efforts to heal a patient with severe burns:

Cathedral silence, and the light
Flooding a square of skin
Stand for deliverance, witness
The expiation of a sin.

Watching the stages of operation — asepsis, anonymity, the knife excising certain death, foreign blood, new skin — he concludes, in the liturgical idiom with which he started:

Now sutures, bandages — the amen;
A spider in the brain
Tugs at its web, returning light
Is flanked by fear, and pain,
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And the uncertainty of years
In which to expiate
One moment’s disrespect for fire,
Discoursery to fate.

In Keats the experience of watching and being unable to help his brother Tom as he declined and eventually died with tuberculosis must have been a major determinant of his emotional and creative life: as a doctor, he knew the risks he himself ran, and when he coughed up blood on 3rd February 1820 he at once recognized this as his ‘death warrant’. His poetry of the previous year is haunted by the sense of transience in a world

Where palsy shakes a few sad, last grey hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;

and haunted, at the same time, by a heightened awareness of the beauty in a world so briefly possessed.

In the poetry of Keats, the sickness of the individual becomes universalized, and we can see its character as a tragic ingredient of the whole created world. Edgar Allan Poe spoke of the ‘fever called “Living”’—though in a more restricted context. This universalized view of sickness emerges with great force from some of John Donne’s poetry. In The Anatomie of the World, for example, moved by sorrow at the untimely death of Elizabeth Drury, he considers the frailty and decay of the world. Starting with man, he writes:

There is no health; Physicians say that wee,
At best, enjoy but a neutralitie.
And can there bee worse sicknesse, than to know
That we are never well, nor can be so?

Extending these observations to the world, he finds it covered with mountains and high hills through which the earth is forced to lose ‘her round proportion’, some of the peaks so high that one might think

The floating Moone would shipwracke there, and sinke;

and he asks:

Are these but warts, and pock holes in the face
Of th’ earth? Thinke so; but yet confesse, in this
The world’s proportion disfigured is.

This, which seems to us a metaphysical extravagance, may have made better sense to Donne’s contemporaries, who were nourished on the diet of rhetoric, a renaissance inheritance from the Middle Ages with its world picture of Order.
Sickness was a preoccupation of Donne in his later days, and linked with thoughts of the after-life. The poem that he is thought to have composed on his deathbed is devoid of self-pity, for the fever and pain are seen by him as tokens of coming release:

Whilst my Physicians 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
Per fretum febris, by these streits to die,
I joy, that in these streits, I see my West.

Lord Brain¹⁰, who was poet as well as neurologist, followed John Donne a stage further, putting into his mouth the following posthumous aphorism:

At last within my tomb I lie.
Pity me not, O passer-by!
Since Death and I in life were one,
I cannot be by Death undone.

Poets often refer to illness — to 'the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to'—in illustrating the transience of human life and happiness. To Donne and to Herbert release from the prison of bodily existence meant a prospect of paradise which made them happy rather than sad at such afflictions, Sir John Davies, in his poem Nosce Teipseum, commenting that 'the Soul springs not from the Body's humours', adds:

If she were but the body's quality
Then would she be with it sick, maim'd and blind,
But we perceive, where these privations be,
A healthy, perfect and sharp-sighted mind.

If the sickness of the poet is reflected — sometimes gloriously — in his writing, the sickness of the world during this century can also be seen reflected in its poetry. The bitterness and frustrations of the First World War were anatomised by Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg, and others. After that war, the world's disease seemed to enter the veins of the poets, producing a disorientation and a disintegration of structure which, in the hands of a master, T. S. Eliot, were more disturbing than many laments or satires. Efforts to cure the disease through political involvement, neoclassicism, and other movements have been frustrated by further disillusionments—by the growth of totalitarianism, by the Second World War, by the atom bomb, and now by the population explosion, pollution, and fears of impending doom.
Poets have reacted predictably, the fringes and growing points of the art showing unusual disorientation. Afraid of direct utterance, suspicious of form and reason, some experimentalists have been suspicious, too, of emotion that rises above the level of visceral sensation.

No doubt these are the fruits of frustration, the effects of our war-shattered, polluted, and mechanized world on sensitive developing minds. But while much of the art generated in this spirit is non-art (or 'anti-art' as some of its apologists would claim), a loosening of academic bonds, a new emphasis on freedom and appetite rather than on rules and taste, could increase the potentialities for creative regeneration.

REFERENCES
8. Eliot, G., Middlemarch, chap. XVIII.

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Plain cards 7 in. × 4 in. Price 60p for 10 cards without envelopes. Postage and packing free.

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Neither card carries a printed greeting.