

INTERPRETACJE LITERATURY ŚWIATOWEJ

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The Communicative Function of Performative Ekphrasis, the Anagram Riddle and Proverbial Sayings in John Donne's Poetic Diptych

Funkcja komunikacyjna ekfrazy, zagadki-anagramu oraz przysłów i aforyzmów w poetyckim dyptyku Johna Donne'a

Słowa kluczowe: poezja angielska XVI/XVII wieku, dyptyk poetycki, przestrzeń intermedialna, synkretyzm gatunkowy, groteska

Keywords: 16th/17th-century English poetry, communication-oriented analysis, intermedia space, multi-generic and dialogic patterns, poetic diptych, grotesquery

Abstract

This essay takes a communication-oriented approach to selected early modern English poetry. It presents a textual analysis of John Donne's elegy *The Anagram*, related to the earlier observations concerning his elegy *The Comparison*, and reveals its multi-generic patterns as well as certain thematic and structural relations between these poems. It thus argues, on textually substantiated grounds, that these elegies may be regarded as a poetic diptych which utilizes features and functions of various forms of communication, associated with literature, visual arts, popular entertainment and folk wisdom. The argument continued in this essay is that Donne draws on the 15/16th-century experimental artistic trend recognized in particular paintings attributed to B. Passarotti and Q. Massys and appears to superimpose text onto the earlier provided images. The comparative analysis of Donne's elegies suggests he brings together different reference objects and his poetic message presupposes the addressee's interaction: certain cognitive and creative processes. By presenting Donne's ekphrasis as evolving from descriptive to performative, this essay indicates the need to further investigate early modern poetry, by means of interdisciplinary tools, for its references to other arts and, more generally, for its communicative potential.

Introduction

John Donne's (1572–1631) poems have been a constant source of inspiration for the subsequent generations of writers due to not only their intriguing subject matter, but also their intricate multi-level composition. Displaying his detail-oriented approach, Donne willingly experiments in the field of poetic hybridization (on this phenomenon in literature see e.g. Mourão 2006). This essay adopts a communication-oriented approach to Donne's verse and focuses on "the supposed processual character of genre blending in interaction of its four communicative components: *text, author, reader, and context*" (following Riesner and Danneck 2015: 1). By analyzing Donne's elegy *The Anagram*, in relation to the earlier observations on his elegy *The Comparison*¹, it points to the specificity of early modern poetry operating within the functions and features of different forms of communication: distinct media and genres. They are all intricately intertwined within one poem (and in the interrelations of two poems viewed as a diptych) in an innovative manner which blends literature with non-literary forms drawn from visual arts, popular entertainment and folk wisdom, altogether serving the principle known as *docere et delectare*.

Donne's poetic experiment

Donne's works considered in this essay were composed in the age of Elizabethan drama. Addressed to the elite circle of courtly aristocracy, recited or sung to an eager audience, the *coterie* poem was then received as performance, as an act of self-creation and a display of wit (Pebworth 1989: 62). It resulted in interaction, integrated oral performance with handwriting, and sound (the melody of language) with image. The outstanding one, remarkable for its "strong lines" and far-reaching conceits, circulated among friends and coterie members, leaving behind numerous manuscripts (61) – copious material for textual scholars seeking the authorial version (Stringer 2000: xxi).

Donne's *The Comparison* and *The Anagram* are numbered 2. and 10. in the Westmoreland manuscript (NY3) sequence of twelve *Elegies* (Stringer 2000: ix–x). In the absence of Donne's holographs, after decades of comparative textual research into the 17th-century manuscripts of his poems and their editions in print, "NY3's ordering of the poems" was marked "authoritative" – with high

¹ This essay continues my argument in: Gładkowska 2022.

probability reflecting “the author’s intended order for the elegies” (lxx). The results were presented in 2000 in the massive second volume of *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*. What is now known beyond doubt, thanks to the combined effort of the *Variorum* textual scholars, is that a specific arrangement of elegies within the cycle of twelve units was an issue of the poet’s particular concern (lx–lxxvi). As noted by Sullivan, this observation will inevitably lead to a complete “revision of the traditional view of Donne” as the author of occasional poems who “took no further interest” in them (2005: 193). What also waits to be described is how this particular organization of twelve *Elegies* correlates with their textual interrelations and how these relations, in turn, influence the reception of Donne’s cycle as a whole.

This essay relates to the latest findings described by the *Variorum* editors – it focuses on the manner in which elegy 10. *The Anagram* completes the thematic and structural field co-created with elegy 2. *The Comparison*. Donne’s poetic experiment (seen as the riddlic quality of his poetry) is recognized in the very fact that these poems are positioned as roughly opposite in the authorial cycle of *Elegies*. Treated independently, they appear complete statements; yet when viewed as a poetic diptych, they reveal new (otherwise unnoticed) aspects of their contribution to the ongoing debate on the role of literary convention in determining the general perception of love.

Donne’s poetic experiment is also seen in his employment of the popular anagram riddle, a seemingly minor element which plays a pivotal role in the message conveyed. The widely known rule of the anagram not only provides the foundation on which the main argument of elegy 10. *The Anagram* rests, but it becomes an integral part of its dialogic relation to elegy 2. *The Comparison*. The anagram principle thus proves the key element of Donne’s concept in what appears, on textually substantiated grounds, his poetic diptych. Furthermore, as argued in this essay, the poet’s concept operates at the interface between distinct media: oral performance, visual arts, and written word². It not only reaches toward high and low literature as well as the non-literary field of popular language games and proverbial statements (folklore), but heavily draws on and further develops the imagery of particular paintings (two of which, on closer examination, themselves reveal a specific diptychal character). It is the seemingly minor anagram riddle employed in elegy 10. *The Anagram*, as the following analysis will show, that

² Following Lotman (1977: 16–8) and Wasilewska-Chmura (2011: 27–8), this essay regards “primary modeling systems that use signs of the same type” as distinct media. Intermediality is recognized when the impact of another medium is observed (31; Wolf 1999: 35–6).

provides an eye-catching link connecting Donne's diptych with Passarotti's genre painting *The Crazy Ones Loving* – both making use of distorted mirror images.

It should be acknowledged, though, that Donne's ekphrasis in *The Comparison* and *The Anagram* is innovative and challenges modern definitions and distinctions³. This essay argues (developing the argument in Gładkowska 2022) it brings together different reference objects, the identification of which is a process depending heavily on the addressee's (listener's/reader's) cognitive skills, to finally prove performative. More precisely, the adopted approach to Donne's poetry (the selected sample being indicative of its still fragmentarily explored communicative potential) allows for revealing a specific metamorphosis of ekphrastic verse from its descriptive to its performative mode. Furthermore, it shows that Donne's variation of ekphrasis is encoded in his elaborate, riddlic poetry and thus calls for an analytical approach, attention to textual detail and sustained intellectual effort. Therefore, the revelation that Donne's ekphrasis is in fact performed within his poetic diptych, with its halves separated and located toward the extreme ends of the cycle of twelve *Elegies*, may be viewed as a solution to the poet's riddle.

In other words, concealed beneath the surface of controversial arguments, specific ekphrasis will be recognized as an important facet of Donne's complex riddle, working toward "enhanced visuality [...] dynamically made up of perception, memory and imagination" (Führer 2017: 162)⁴. However, it is ekphrastic performance that should be identified as the main supporting pillar of Donne's concept. Its "theatricality," when combined with the brain-training exercise and intense visuality (resulting in the synergy of the senses), places the addressee in the position of "a participating spectator" (terms in Führer 2017: 161; cf. Plett 2012), expected not only to receive the message but also to co-create it. As the proposed analysis will show, Donne employs ekphrasis as a potent rhetorical device and does it in the classical sense, designing it to be functional "as an attention-arresting device ... enigmatic riddle [and] emotional intensifier" (Zeitlin 2013: 20, on "the classical function of ekphrastic discourse"). In his attempt to

³ Ekphrasis is defined as "verbal representation of visual representation" (Heffernan 1993: 3). On ekphrasis restricted to the description of works of art, see Webb 1999: 15; Słodczyk 2018: 158. On the term *ekphrasis* narrowed to "the invocation of plastic objects [...] considered in spatial [...] terms," see Horstkotte 2017: 129. As noted in Słodczyk (2018: 158), the modern understanding of the term allows for a broader perspective: interpretive texts and subjective commentaries are also regarded in terms of ekphrasis. On "art as a subject for description [...] understood as a genre all its own" see Zeitlin 2013: 19.

⁴ From Führer's observations on "ekphrasis – as performed in" Thomas Kling's poetry.

convey a didactic message, he does not merely imitate, but aims at “making the absent present” (see the function of ancient ekphrasis in Webb 2009: 105) and, by employing the anagram rule, succeeds in involving the addressee in the process of actively “producing into presence” (phrase in Agamben 1999: 72; Führer 2017: 161). Thanks to the anagram motif, as well as the employment of (inter)textual dialogic patterns, Donne’s poetic diptych not only exhausts the particular definitions of ekphrasis, but goes beyond them into an experimental linguistic dimension, which adds constant dynamics to his poetic utterance. In simpler words, the poet converts a non-literary form of entertainment into an organizing principle of his poetic creation, which works (inter)textually⁵ and across distinct media, escaping the boundaries imposed by modern typologies.

Binary oppositions, mirror images, the anagram riddle and Passarotti’s dog-figure in Donne’s poetic diptych

Elegy 10. *The Anagram* in its very first line instructs the addressee: “Marry, and love thy Flauia” (1). It is therefore, at once, received as a thematic antithesis of elegy 2. *The Comparison* with its final imperative: “Leaue her” (53)⁶. These poems can also be viewed, structurally, as binary oppositions not only due to their cyclical interrelation: end ⇔ beginning, but also due to their location at the opposite ends of Donne’s sequence of twelve *Elegies*, suggesting the whole cycle is organized non-linearly.

Flavia, the central figure of *The Anagram*, possesses all the key attributes of beauty observed in the *Portrait of Laura in the Laurentian Library* (15/16th c.), which depicts a woman universally recognized but never identified as real, the frame character of 366 poetic works by Petrarch. However, Donne presents Flavia as a grotesque cluster of colors and shapes, all desired yet all chaotically misplaced in her face:

Marry, and love thy Flauia for Shee
 Hath all things wherby others bewteous bee. (1–2)
 Though all her parts be not in th’ vsuall place
 She hath yet **an Anagram of a good face.** (15–6) (emphasis mine)

⁵ Following Nycz (1990), intertextuality is viewed as “the totality of properties and relations in a given text which indicates the dependence of its creation and reception on the knowledge of other texts [...] in the process of communication” (97); transl. mine.

⁶ See both texts in Stringer 2000: 51, 217. In parentheses: line numbers.

Line 16., in which the anagram rule is finally pinpointed, relates to the prior characterization of Flavia and, delayed, clearly aims to surprise the addressee (the title given to the elegy in the 1635 edition of *Poems* prematurely reveals Donne's clue). Yet the very knowledge of the rule also encourages one to solve the anagram by shuffling the letters in the designated lexical area: "a good face". Such is the function of the anagram. By definition it requires mental activity, a degree of intellectual effort. Donne's concept rests on the principle, non-literary in its roots, which effectively fulfils the phatic function and simultaneously introduces the addressee to the analytical and the entertainment levels of the poem. Its effect may be further illustrated by means of narratological terminology, since it is similar to that of the narrative gap (def. in Abbott 2007: 49). In other words, it is both an eye-catching element and an incentive to co-create Donne's poetic message, to actively participate in the reorganization of what remains ill-positioned. By stimulating their "mental actions" and "mental imaging" (Rembowska-Płucienik 2012: 294; cf. Hühn and Sommer 2012: 3.1), the anagram motif engages the addressee in a process, both cognitive and creative.

Even though the first attempt to solve Donne's anagram does not require much linguistic effort, it still proves fruitful – it projects a mirror image in which the lady undergoes a visual metamorphosis: a GOOD face \rightleftharpoons a DOOG face. Regardless of the slight inaccuracy in spelling, this may come as a revelation: the female head described in *The Anagram* may indeed be visualized as the dog's head:

For though her eyes be smale, her mouth is great,
 Though they be luory, yet her teethe are leat:
 Though they be dimme, yet She is Light inough
 And though her harsh haire fall, her skin is rough. (3–6)

At this point, it is worthwhile to observe the link between Donne's elegy and Bartolomeo Passarotti's genre painting *The Crazy Ones Loving*, also known as *Marry Company* (*Allagra Compagnia*, c. 1550) (fig. 1, p. 143).

Passarotti's dog figure and its mixed company ideally correlate with Donne's set of four characters in his poetic diptych: the thematic and compositional space co-created by *The Anagram* and *The Comparison*. Though this affinity cannot be supported with biographical facts, the textual evidence appears substantial. Added to the image projected by the anagram itself, such is, directly, the characterization of Flavia by Donne's speaker: small eyes, great ivory mouth, dark (jet, dim) teeth, and harsh hair.

The poetic caricature built at the interface between intellectual game and sensory experience should be viewed, it seems, as a product of intermedia interaction. The superimposition of the anagram principle on the speaker's oratorical



Fig. 1. *The Crazy Ones Loving* – oil on canvas. Public domain⁷

performance highlights Flavia's resemblance to Passerotti's dog. This is in particular the case in view of the dog's position in *The Crazy Ones Loving* – at the tavern table, as a companion to the younger man, where one would expect, in accordance with the rule of symmetry (and that of the mirror image), to see a woman (on “the mirror image as a metaphor” in Donne, see Stringer 2017: 260).

As indicated earlier, in *The Anagram* the poet utilizes the principle of a popular word puzzle (a form of entertainment) to organize his (inter)textual field of what eventually proves a serious polemic against literary convention and commonly

⁷ Accessed via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bartolomeo_Passerotti_Allegra_Compagnia.jpg.

accepted criteria for evaluating female beauty. However, similarly to the situation in *The Comparison*, his speaker is in a joking mood. *The Anagram* thus shows the features of a poetic riddle based on a semi-open word play. The anagram rule, though marked by simplicity, strongly activates the mind and results in numerous associations behind which there are images intensely affecting the sphere of the senses.

The alleged dialogue of Donne's speakers in Passarotti's tavern

What is gradually being uncovered, intertextually and intermedially, is the dialogic character of Donne's two elegies. As already argued when analyzing *The Comparison*, the concept seems to have been initially inspired by the juxtaposition of Petrarch's Laura (fig. 2) and *The Ugly Duchess* (attributed to Quentin Massys) (fig. 3):



Fig. 2. *Portrait of Laura in the Laurentian Library*, 15/16th c. Public domain⁸



Fig. 3. *The Ugly Duchess*, c. 1513. Public domain⁹

to be finally transposed to the bawdy context of Passarotti's *The Crazy Ones Loving* (fig. 1, p. 143).

⁸ Accessed via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Francesco_Petrarca01_page.jpg.

⁹ Accessed via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Quentin_Matys_-_A_Grotesque_old_woman.jpg.

It is in the frame of Passarotti's painting that the performances of Donne's two speakers – in elegies 2. and 10. – really fit and gain a proper context, combining into a dialogue. The impression that Donne creates his poetic diptych by utilizing the setting earlier provided by Passarotti is overwhelming. In this setting the conversation of Donne's speakers meaningfully continues, occasionally swerving (as explained in Gładkowska 2022) toward Massys' *Portrait of an Old Woman*, to realistically illustrate the imprint of time on the body, or toward Passarotti's *Caricature of an Old Couple*, to parody an act of kissing¹⁰. What is more, a closer look at both Passarotti's paintings: *The Crazy Ones Loving* and *Caricature of an Old Couple* leads to an interesting observation – the couple depicted in the latter seems an intensified caricature of that occupying the right side of the former. The facial features and the hairstyles appear similar, though there are visible signs of aging. What is more, the latter depicts an episode which clearly relates to the former, extending the chain of actions presented therein. When positioned side by side, the paintings thus reveal their (temporally and spatially) dynamic character of a specific diptych.

The possibility that all the affinities noticed above result solely from the artists' fondness of the common trend seems unlikely, as certain factors cumulate to indicate referencing. These are: the chronology of the works mentioned, Donne's versatile education, his well-described interest in visual culture (Hurley 2005: 204) and, last but not least, the textual evidence itself. Donne's elegies 2. and 10. have been received as highly controversial (see Stringer 2000: 545–67, 757–77). Yet, in fact, the tavern ambience depicted in Passarotti's *The Crazy Ones Loving* (fig. 1, p. 143) fully accounts for the disrespectful lexis and tone of these poems. When viewed as a poetic diptych and considered against Passarotti's genre painting, elegies 2. and 10. combine into the conversation of two amused men – two foreground figures depicted with the painter's brush (see: the mouth wide open indicates who speaks first). The dialogue thus appears co-created at the interface between visual arts and poetry. In Donne's elegies it gains its script and its vocal layer. It is actually performed by the lyrical subjects located at roughly the opposite ends of the sequence of *Elegies* to which they belong. It seems also at this point, in the organization of the authorial cycle, the playfully treated (a)symmetry – the concept of distorted mirror images noticeable in the positioning of two male figures in *The Crazy Ones Loving* – is preserved.

¹⁰ Private collection, see e.g.: <https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/PORTRAIT-OF-AN-OLD-WOMAN/B3AAA9A645DB3E5E>; <https://www.art-prints-on-demand.com/a/passarotti-bar-tolomeo/caricature.html>.

Thereby the poet himself is seen as “a prosumer (producer and consumer)” who co-creates particular motifs of the common theme, who weaves subsequent threads of the scene initiated by someone else within another artistic medium (based on Boczkowska 2014: 136), responding creatively not only to the theme, but also to the structure of the selected work(s). He does it in an area paradoxical by nature, striving for the convergence of opposites, among them not only beauty and ugliness, but also a joke and a serious stance, tradition and novelty, poetic genres and non-literary forms. In other words, he utilizes the features of various vehicles for carrying information available in his times.

Regarding elegies 2. and 10. in terms of the dialogic text layered on Passarotti’s scene, one notices that the lyrical “I” in the latter poem (cf. the right side of the painting) (fig. 1, p. 143) makes an attempt to outsmart his opponent in what appears a mere display of wit. Still in a playful mood, on hearing his companion’s mocking comparison of the ladies: “my Mistres” vs. “thy Mistres” (*The Comparison* 4, 7)¹¹, he replies with an unexpected move. He argues that, logically speaking, Flavia (see the interlocutor’s animal partner) brings together the colors of beauty: sufficient amount of red, high-quality shades of black and white, and precious ivory. She has all the desired attributes and may, therefore, be called perfectly beautiful. After all, when buying perfume, one asks about the ingredients, their location within the bottle is irrelevant:

These things are bewtyes Elements: where these
Meete in one, that one must as perfect please. (9–10)
In buying things perfum’d, we ask if there
Be Muske and amber in it, but not where. (13–4)

The speaker strives, as strenuously as his counterpart in *The Comparison*, for the synergy of the senses. In his eloquent parodic speech he harnesses particular colors and aromas, as well as images and textures – “her harsh haire fall, her skin is rough” (6) – to revitalize, boost and then synchronize consecutive senses, as it seems, in defiance of the original function of the genre to which Donne’s poems aspire in the very title: *Elegies*. Simultaneously, though, by drawing analogies the lyrical “I” appeals to reason and highlights the necessity to consider the logic of his own argument.

When his astounding monologue is already advanced, the speaker encourages his companion and his larger audience¹² (see communication levels as depicted by

¹¹ For the other part of the alleged script see the analysis of *The Comparison* in: Gładkowska 2022.

¹² As much as the reader.

Passarotti) to apply the anagram rule within the scope of “a good face”. They thus begin to perform their own, increasingly complicated, linguistic maneuvers, for the riddle may be concealed in one, two, or even all three of the quoted words. The seemingly uncomplicated task of shifting letters within a short phrase, its lexical complexity reduced to the minimum, in search of a satisfactory solution promptly develops into a process, indeed both cognitive and creative. It consists in a series of combinations, invariably interpreted as imperfect, as slightly out of line with the imposed rule which requires the use of all and only the elements designated. However, the lack of a fully correct solution eventually turns out to be a major advantage. In fact, it is slight imperfection, a little flaw, such as a misspelling or a missing letter, that becomes a stimulating mechanism and gives an impulse to continue exploring the potential of the proposed word play. In the wake of repeated attempts by the addressee to solve the anagram puzzle, various associations are triggered and vivid images projected, such as: *dog face(es)*, *faeca(l)* (see Brown 1993: 905), reinforcing the vision of hideousness and the feeling of abomination. The results may be numerous and individually received, yet each time what is experienced is a combination of mental exercise and sensory input, a fusion of analysis and entertainment, the cumulative effect being that of a gradual increase in mockery.

Operating on the ground skillfully molded to unify rational and empirical cognition, Donne’s speaker then refers to folklore – he cites proverbs/aphorisms, tips and warnings, preserved in the oral tradition and perceived as an expression of wisdom based on experience and common sense. However, in *The Anagram* even those epigrammatic statements lose their inherently profound quality and are caricatured by the speaker for the needs of his ludicrous burlesque-style display of rhetoric:

A perfect Song, others will vndertake (20)
 Love built on bewty soone as bewty dyes; (27)
 For one nights revells silke and gold we chuse
 But in long iourneys Cloth and Leather vse. (33–4)

Donne’s elegy reveals characteristics of a poetic satire that touches upon both high culture and orally transmitted statements of folk wisdom. Similarly to the situation in elegy 2., in elegy 10. the artistic and the domestic spheres counterbalance each other as if on scales. On the one hand, Donne’s speaker exposes to ridicule the well-established standard rooted in the poetry of Petrarch and his followers: the Italian sonnet with its courtly love conventions which are readily convertible into tools effective enough to confidently assert the superiority of ugliness over beauty. On the other, he ironically treats the collection of popular

clichés used to downgrade female beauty by declaring it useless and therefore redundant or even treacherous.

The source of this phenomenon is, in turn, to be traced in ancient Greece. It is there that the topos of the “happy old woman” as an “archetype of indestructible life” converged with tales of ancient heroines representing dangerous, destructive beauty utilized for the sake of a treacherous strategy. The result was a reversal of the traditional perception of beauty and ugliness (Czerwińska 2016: 59–64). By juxtaposing two traditions stemming from and affecting both high and low culture, Donne attains two goals – first, he points to the dissonance between long-standing artistic conventions (ideas) and folk wisdom (experience); secondly, he calls into question both these conventions and social beliefs.

The Anagram ends with the maxim: “For things in fashion euery man will wear” (56), which, when combined with its starting point: “Marry and love thy Flauia,” can be treated literally as an incentive to fall in love with safe and useful ugliness Flavia has grown to symbolize. However, what one learns from the analysis of the dialogic interaction of Donne’s speakers, performed and illustrated at the interface between poetry and painting, is that no one can possibly meet a woman like Flavia. *The Anagram* actually confirms the impossibility to ensure complete security and pragmatism in love by twice negating Flavia’s existence: “One like none and likd of none fittest wear” (55). So the poem’s message is to be found elsewhere.

By mocking artificially conceived standards and encouraging the addressee’s creativity, Donne’s elegy seems to intertextually postulate the superiority of individual, subjective, perspectives. It may therefore be viewed as fulfilling a didactic function. The clash of exaggerated ugliness and idealized beauty is a purposeful mechanism – it draws attention to the subject and concurrently prevents relativism in its interpretation. In other words, all the senses must be severely affected for sensations to be indisputable and the logic riddle to be solved. Flavia’s dog-like appearance as much as the unimaginable hideousness depicted in *The Comparison*, as logical impossibilities, automatically negate the statements they are incorporated in.

The motif of the woman’s face, by the anagram rule turned into the dog’s face, is surprising, distinctive and intriguing. As such, it serves as an easily perceivable link to Passarotti’s *The Crazy Ones Loving* with its further references and, above all, an excellent visual teaching aid contributing significantly to the development of Donne’s message well camouflaged in his intertextual poetic riddle. The particular pieces of this puzzle are to be identified separately within the frame of *The Anagram* and that of *The Comparison*, on the level of the non-linear thematic and structural relations of these poems in the sequence of *Elegies*, and

in the network of links extending toward contemporaneous visual arts and other non-literary forms.

Donne's interactive concept: message co-created on the universal plane of added-on meanings

In general, the poet's concept, entangled in the late 16th-century social and literary context, presupposes various aspects that influence the addressee's engagement. Depending, to a large degree, on multidimensional interaction with the addressee, it involves different modes of communication, develops intermedially and across various (non)literary forms and genres. As such it is considered a useful tool for the poet's polemics against convention, which, in turn, work toward his ultimate goal, cunningly concealed under the guise of grotesquery, ridicule and derision. Contrary to what a cursory analysis may indicate, labeling both *The Comparison* and *The Anagram* as elegies, Donne draws on the very beginnings of the genre – the funeral roots of *elegeia*. Each of them individually and both together, these poems aim to disassemble the existing ill-conceived models of love, to unweave deep-seated patterns of thought, either too idealistic (high, artistic) or too pragmatic (low, domestic). Both defying logic, the patterns are set in what imitates a real-world context where they instantly display their state of decay and, in fact, grow to negatively affect the senses. The speakers' rhetoric, as much as the images in the works of art mentioned, might be seen as absolutely outrageous, but they must be extreme to bury old attitudes and clear the ground for a new conception of human love relations. After all, it has been known from time immemorial that things brought to their extreme naturally turn into their opposites, that "all things are generated in this way, opposites from opposites" (Plato, *Phaedo*, section 71a). Donne's elegies also reach their own specific state of equilibrium in that they balance all the aspects recognized above: empirical and analytical, entertaining and didactic, polemical and dialogic, satirical and persuasive, presenting them as mutually dependent and inseparable and alternately shifting them to the foreground.

Thanks to the anagram motif yet another boundary is blurred – that between the lexical domain of the author and that of the reader in the epochs to follow. The following combinations will serve as examples: "a good face" = *goo facade* ("sickly sentiment" + "deceptive ... outward appearance") or "good face" = *goof'd ace* ("a stupid blunder" + "a person who excels at" that)¹³. Interestingly,

¹³ For the 16th/17th-c. language context, see the words in Brown 1993: 16, 902, 1116, 1118.

these solutions to Donne's anagram riddle, achieved in full accordance with the principle (in a manner exhausting all the letters) and thus expected to hold presupposed associations, include words marked as initiated in the 19th and 20th centuries. Operating in the sphere of loose associations, having at their disposal a small number of letters selected by the poet, centuries later readers may still create meanings and interpret them as related to nauseating feelings and attitudes, a facade behind which there is no house, or an error in the quest for perfection. The results are still perfectly in tune with the anti-Petrarchan tone of *The Anagram* and *The Comparison* as well as Donne's other lyrics. Although the outcomes may be multiple and the analysis of the very word play risky from the methodological point of view, it must be acknowledged that, as such, they remain an integral part of the poet's concept. Similar conclusions are formed by Ricks after his comprehensive study on the use of the anagram rule in the works of Shakespeare and other Renaissance poets (including Donne, Jonson, and Herbert) as well as selected poets of later periods (2003: 113). By making the anagram motif an organizing principle of his poetic supercode, Donne clearly encourages the implied addressee to undertake such endeavors. Given the growing number of possible combinations and the flexibility of language, the very process of solving Donne's anagram still appears more valuable than any of its single products. The addressee's involvement in the game proposed by the poet, in the dynamics of language – concepts and images behind words – is in fact equal to the co-creation of the universal communication plane, an experimental platform of added-on meanings, superimposed on the poem's semantic layer.

Conclusion

The anagram motif is just a piece in Donne's wide-ranging, sophisticated poetic puzzle. It is embedded in the intertextual links between *The Comparison* and *The Anagram* – thematic antitheses carrying their controversial motifs to extremes and at the same time located toward the extreme ends of the sequence of twelve *Elegies*. This specific unity as well as the dialogic nature of Donne's poetic diptych are truly inspiring. They suggest the sequence should be read non-linearly and encourage further comparisons of the poems in search of binary oppositions, mirror images, and other thematic and structural relations. Thereby, *The Comparison* and *The Anagram* fulfill the function of a specific instruction manual for the whole poetic cycle which may otherwise be perceived as lacking in coherence, for it presents contrasting viewpoints on the nature of love relationships. This pair of

poems indicates how to approach Donne's *Elegies* so as to efficiently participate in the field of debate outlined by the author's arrangement of texts and his introduction of distinct personae.

Given the performative ekphrasis and the universal nature of the elements of popular culture incorporated in Donne's verse, which "form points of contact or bridges between different media" (Wolf 2002: 18), the sample of Donne's poetry selected for the purpose of this essay and considered in the late Renaissance context is a manifestation not only of intense intertextuality, but also of transmediality tailored to the limitations of the poet's times. And even though "little is known about Donne's artistic tastes" and some further analogies may "proceed from largely unconscious affinities" (Ellrodt 1984: 121), this essay indicates that the impact of visual arts on his poetry (as well as the poetry of his contemporaries) should be further investigated. Observing in Donne's verse certain stylistic elements typical of later mid-17th-century baroque style, Dobrez rightly states that greater emphasis should be placed on "linking developments in literature to the wider world of sculpture, painting, architecture and music" (1980: 89). The sophistication of the presented techniques of shaping poetic messages attests to the need for interdisciplinary approaches to early modern literary texts, involving textual criticism, literary criticism and communication studies.

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