

JOHN DONNE'S HOMILIES: PARADOX AS AN INSTRUMENT OF THEOPOETIC EVOCATION

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Sermons frequently reveal the paradoxical character of the theopoetic narrative mode. On the whole, there is the labyrinthine circulation of meaning above all the forms of discourse wherein God is named. In fact, men often experience mental conflicts both when confronting love and faith, as they strive by the power of reason to know the infinite and to express it. John Donne's Metaphysical wit proves an effective way of revealing the great paradoxes of Christian faith. However, at the beginning of his career as a prose writer, Donne used to construct short literary pieces modeled on the Italian paradox. This flippancy genre born in Italy is a peculiarly Renaissance product that, according to Archibald Edward Malloch, in popularity "rivalled the epigram, perhaps even the sonnet" at the time (Malloch, 1956, 191). As a rule, such individual exercises in casuistry have the most extravagant titles, e. g. *A Paradoxe Proving That Baldnesse Is Much Better Than Bushie Haire; That Only Cowards Dare Dye; That Old Men Are More Fantastique Than Yonge; A Defence of Women's Inconstancy*, etc.

In one of his letters Donne, still a young poet, makes the following observations regarding the function of these belying compositions:

...they carry with them a confession of their lightness and [the reader's] trouble and my

shame. But indeed they were made rather to deceive time than her daughter Truth – although they have been written in an age when anything is strong enough to overthrow her. If they make you to find better reasons against them, they do their office ... They are rather alarms, to truth to arm her than enemies, and they have only this advantage to scape from being called ill things, that they are nothings. Therefore take heed of allowing any of them, lest you make another. ("A Letter possibly to Sir Henry Wotton (1600)", Donne, 1992, 64–65)

Donne specifies them as light things, more than that, nothings, since the arguments that are at their core, come out to be but distortions of arguments. Paradoxes have no argumentative substance as such, nonetheless, they retain the nature of "statements of arguments" (Malloch, 1956, 193). The method lying behind is that of the deconstruction of the generally accepted opinions or truths. Furthermore, the paradox though misrepresents truth yet escapes a lie. However, this is possible only by resisting truth that ought to be done by the reader as a participant in the offered game: if the paradoxes provoke "better reasons against them, they do their office." In fact, the paradox is a challenge of scandalous quality (*an alarm*, as Donne puts it) that evokes the vitality of the mind in its

attempt to reconstruct the conceptual framework of truth. In one of his sermons, when speaking of the nature of women (whether a woman was created according to God's image or "to man's was made" (Donne, 1992, 350) Donne stresses the "extravagancy of Paradoxes". He calls them "singularities" produced "out of a petulancy and wantonnesse of wit" always causing a doubt, "almost an assurance in the negative [or opposite]" (Donne, 1987, 305). It should be emphasized that the paradoxical discourse lacks conceptual foundation, the focus being laid on mere verbalism. According to Malloch's insight, in the paradox, "the argument lives only in the particular words of the author. Remove or change those words and the argument vanishes" (Malloch, 1956, 194). On the other hand, it requires careful attention of the author to the proper formulation of the discrete statements to gain the equivocal effect. Equivocation here goes hand in hand with mockery and teasing thus allowing the reader no neutrality, either intellectual or emotional. As Donne claims in his letter, the goal of a paradoxer is not to deceive the truth but pretend the deceptiveness in order to force the audience into awareness of new qualities in things or hitherto unseen relationships between things. The ludic tone of the paradox creates the detachment from the personal, as the author does not actually believe in what he says. Rather, his aim is to employ "falsehood as the cause of knowledge" (*ibid.*, 196). However, the Renaissance paradoxes frequently display an inflection of irony, which brings Malloch to the conclusion that "the genre of paradox... is closely connected with the literature of scepticism" (*ibid.*, 202).

Originally *para doxa* was merely a view that contradicted an accepted opinion. Its etymology, as the dictionaries of literary terms inform, refers

to an utterance that is beyond belief, i. e. against what one should normally expect. Nonetheless, it provokes closer inspection, which leads to the final reconciliation of the conflicting opposites. Such a mode of understanding, surprisingly self-contradictory in its character, is traced in Donne's sermonic theopoetics: the homilies reveal the preacher's intellectual engagement through paradox. Here spiritual devotion is allied with intellectual ingenuity:

...our afflictions are but light, because there is an exceeding and an eternall waight of glory attending them. If it were not for that exceeding waight of glory, no other waight in this world could turne the scale, or waigh downe those infinite waights of afflictions that oppresse us here. It is not onely *Job* that complains, That he was a burden to himself. It is not onely *Jeremy* that complains, *Aggravit compedes*, That God had made their fetters and their claims heavy to them, but the workmen in harvest complaine, That God had made a faire day heavy unto them... Sand is heavy, sayes *Solomon*; And how many suffer so? Under a sand-hill of crosses, daily, hourelly afflictions, that are heavy by their number, if not by their single waight? And a stone is heavy; and how many suffer so? How many, without any former preparatory crosse, or comminatory, or commonitory crosse, even in the midst of prosperity, and security, fall under some one stone, some grind-stone, some mill-stone, some one insupportable crosse that ruines them? But then (sayes *Solomon* there) *A fooles anger is heavier than both... David and Solomon* have cryed out, That all this world is *vanity*, and *levity*; And (God knowes) all is waight, and burden, and heavinesse, and oppression; And if there were not a waight of future glory to counterpoise it, we should all sinke into nothing. (Donne, 1987, 233)

The gist of the paradoxical idea is that the eternal glory, which the reader or listener might be inclined to associate with incredible lightness, is heavier than the earthly burden of

afflictions. Moreover, the preacher asserts that human afflictions, though extremely heavy (heavy as a stone, a grind or mill-stone, heavy as a sand-hill) are, in fact, light. The audience might find the passage rather confusing: what should be light is weighty and, vice versa, what is light should be considered heavy. One feels to be caught up in a trap. However, Donne reconciles the contraries by introducing the prevailing image of the scales which determine lightness or heaviness of the things weighed. Since the eternal glory is stronger in importance and power, it outweighs temporal calamities whose domination in life appears to be no other than impermanent. Both emotional and spiritual movement encoded in the passage corresponds to the downward-upward movement of the ends of the scales. When Donne recalls the archetypal Biblical complaints focusing on the weight of afflictions, the reader or listener feels heavy with sin and suffering, or, to be more precise, weighed down in the imagined scales on which he meditates. To be so “waighed downe” into the “fearfull depth”, “that bottomlesse depth” is “spiritual misery” (*ibid.*, 236). However, with the introduction of the context of eternity, the situation changes into the opposite: the weighed down end of the balance moves suddenly upwards, which brings a great emotional relief to the audience. The earthly burden, in spite of its enormous weight, comes out to be light. Nevertheless, Donne offers no invitation to enjoy lightness: what, basically, matters is weight, since there is no lighter thing than vanity (or emptiness) – “all this world is vanity, and levity”. The word *levity* is very suggestive in the given context as, being the derivative from the Latin *levis* that points to lightness, it also implies a lift (on the scales) expressed in the Latin *levare* (both Latin words have the same root) (*The Concise Dictionary of English Etymology*, 1993, 246).

By use of the paradox, the devotional author strives to bring belief and religious emotion into the realm of the expressible. Donne’s Metaphysical wit enables him to reveal great paradoxes of Christian faith. The paradoxical mode of his writing keeps in step with Christian theology, which recognizes the paradoxical character of human life, and his poetical gifts. Donne relishes a profound intellectual pleasure by challenging the reader’s/listener’s habits of thought.

Sometimes the purpose of the Donnean paradox is merely to exhibit a cleverly falsified argument, whether in verse or in prose. On the whole, discord for him had a special charm, to say more, in it the poet-preacher discovered the mysterious dynamism of creative energy.

Obviously, the paradox reinforces the text. At first sight or hearing, it evokes a sense of absolute absurdity. Consider: “Since all forms, uniform deformity / Doth cover...” (Donne, *The Storm*, lines 69–70). The reader is forced to cope with the material that is clearly self-contradictory. Moreover, in the given case, one comes across the paradoxical knot that is tied by the technique of a pun. Pointed antithesis, in its turn, is achieved by use of the antonymous prefixes *uni-* and *de-*.

The paradox creates logical tension by unsettling the mind through the startling sense of incongruity and disproportion. Paradoxical discourse never promises an ordinary gentle knocking on ear-gate, but rather, an intrusion, a thrust. Since the aim of each paradox is to arouse wonder by “violent imputation” (Brooks, 1981, 261), the meaning is uncovered by rolling down over one’s head. Still, the paradoxer manipulates a chaotic material that is potentially fraught with a code of order:

This, as an amber drop enwraps a bee,
Covering discovers your quick soul; that we
May in your through- shine front your heart’s
thoughts see.
(Donne, *To the Countess of Bedford*, lines 25–27)

Malloch suggests that the paradoxical mode of writing could have tempted Donne as a challenge of making “something out of nothing, giving utterance to an argument that is not there” (Malloch, 1956, 193). Though the reader’s first reaction is that of rejection, however, an element of play, which in its essence is dramatic, does not allow an escape. He gets involved and is, to quote Montaigne, “disarmed” (Montaigne, “Apology for Raimond Sebond“, cited in: Malloch, 1956, 203). The audience being disarmed, the truth is armed (“they [paradoxes] are... alarms to truth to arm her”; Donne, 1992, 65). Thus, the process of reading turns into wrestling for sense in spite of nonsense. Mental pleasure is achieved by the recognition that seeming absurdity may signify truth. According to G. Santayana, “contradiction means only variety, and variety means spontaneity, wealth of resource, and a nearer approach to total adequacy” (Santayana, cited in: Charlesworth, 1974, 218). Hence logical inconsistency grows into emotional consistency. Another aspect of importance here is a sudden loss of mental sight when encountered with the paradoxical text but only to have it revived: blindness is necessary for evoking an insight. In other words, it initiates viewing one’s life in a blinding light. Neat paradoxical statements are always valid. They are invented to overcome the banal contents of life by reshaping a traditional mode of thinking and “forc[ing] out of the normal channels of meaning” (Frye, 1992, 228). Since the paradox is the method of translation of the transcendental into human, the paradoxical language demonstrates the Metaphysical leap, as in the case of Donne’s oxymoronic explanation: “O miserable abundance, O beggarly riches” (Donne, 1992, 337).

The most resolved and elaborate of the poet-preacher’s paradoxes is the paradox of the “living buried man” (*The Progresse of the Soule*, line 160). Death has been a puzzling question in all

times, as in his fallen condition man faces a terror of mortality. Moreover, he is torn between the horror of life and a fright of death: “despair behind, and death before” (*Holy Sonnet 13*, line 3). Naturally, such a state can be best expressed in terms of paradox:

All our periods and transitions in this life are so many passages from death to death..., from the womb to the grave, and in the grave itself, we pass from death to death... (Donne, 1992, 403, 410)

In his death discourse, to quote Odette de Mourgues, “the senses and the spirit are usurping each other’s vested interests” (Mourgues, 1970, 95). Donne’s paradoxical vision embraces both vulgar and higher spheres, since he is convinced that “no metaphor, no comparison is too high, none too low, too trivial, to imprint in you the sense of God’s everlasting goodnesse towards you” (Donne, 1987, 272). Indeed, the language used demonstrates disruptive character:

Nor do all these, youth out of infancy, or age out of youth, arise so, as a phoenix out of the ashes of another phoenix formerly dead, but as a wasp or a serpent out of a carrion, or as a snake out of dung. (Donne, 1992, 405)

On the whole, the author’s intention is not to sing “siren like, to tempt” but to be “harsh” (*To Mr. S. B.*, lines 9–10), the principle applied by him even in lyrics. It may be regarded as the fruit of tormented, restless, and agitated the seventeenth-century sensibility.

The nature of the death paradox is extremely dramatic. To say more, it is a desperate thrust causing confusion of thought and feeling:

Our very birth and entrance into this life is exitus a morte, an issue from death for in our mother’s womb we are dead... This deliverance..., the death of the womb is an entrance, a delivering over to another death, the manifold deaths of this world. We have a winding sheet in our

mother's womb which grows with us in our conception, and we come into the world wound up in that winding-sheet, for we come to seek the grave. We celebrate our own funerals with cries even at our birth... (Donne, 1992, 402, 404)

As L. E. Mäll affirms in his analysis of *Astahasrika Prajnaparamita*, emotional comprehension may arise prior to logical knowledge, which is proved in the case of paradoxical language. Moreover, the first reaction in the recipient consciousness is that of serious and deep distress (Donne's contemporaries claim that the congregation was greatly touched by his sermons – women fainted and men wept). With the help of the death paradox the preacher provokes the state of a shock (both mental and emotional), which, in fact, is a necessity for enlivening the process of enlightenment. According to Mäll, spiritual teachers arouse such a state of uncertainty, fear, and depression purposely. They consider it a certain instrument of spiritual protection (Мяль, 1987, 34). Both the priest and the congregation face the impossibility of logical comprehension of the mysteries of human life. Thus, the paradox proves to be the best means for revealing the inner conflicts which reason cannot control. Besides, the paradox is the power to open up the reader/listener to new possibilities, to discover other way of seeing into the mixture of things in time. However, the recipient consciousness, in its turn, must be sensitive to the paradoxical expression. Mäll stresses the importance of faith in this context, since believing consciousness is not afraid of paradox. On the contrary, it welcomes the paradoxical message and is eager to unite completely irreconcilable ideas or statements in presenting a central body of truth.

In the Renaissance genre, the paradoxical mode is an instrument of melancholy, therefore, irony prevails in it. However, the final effect

obtained in the homiletic discourse rests on awed wonder and startling revelation, though, in the course, wonder is mixed with irony. Donne's style and manner in creating paradoxes, the death paradox in particular, are eccentrically individual. They also betray the imagination emancipated by scepticism (Carey, 1985, 253). Obviously, the preacher was enjoyed by the audience whose taste and wit were extravagant.

At times, Donne's paradoxes are verbally compressed (e. g. "at our end begins our endless rest"; *La Corona*, line 10), yet most often they are extended. Surely, the aim is not a mere rejoicing in the teasing of the audience by the violent technique but an attempt, in Ramsey's view, to "bridge the unbridgeable" (Ramsey, 1974, 162).

In the death paradox, one comes across the best exploitation of the paradoxical technique. This paradox dominates the majority of Donne's homilies and devotional poems. An incredible virtuosity is achieved by Donne in the sermon called *Death's Duell, or, a Consolation to the Soul, against the Dying Life, and Living Death of the Body* preached 25 February 1631, which appeared to Isaac Walton "stiled... [as] the authors owne funeral Sermon" (Donne, 1987, 310). Evidently, the homily is empowered by the paradoxical situation out of which it arises. Here the poet-preacher invents the striking paradoxes while wrestling, to put it in P. Ricoeur's wording, with the unavoidable "paradoxes of humankind's historicity" (Ricoeur, 1995, 235). He perceives death as a mode of being and as a Metaphysical concept.

Donne's most sustained paradox on death falls into several divisions:

1. *Birth is death:*

Birth and death is all one ... we bring the Cradle, and the Grave together by a course of nature... (Donne, 1992, 149)

The archetypal interpretation of conception of death is frequent in writings. Having entered the world by sin, death reigns in the life of man from its very beginning: "In sin did my mother conceive me (there I died one death)" (*ibid.*, 406).

This archetypal motif has attracted many authors in various epochs, as it is manifest, for example, in *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* by R. M. Rilke:

And what a melancholy beauty this gave to women when they were pregnant and stood there with their slender hands instinctively resting on their large bellies in which there were two fruits: a child and a death. Didn't the dense, almost nourishing smile on their emptied faces come from their sometimes feeling that both were growing inside them? (Rilke, 1990, 16)

2. The paradox of *dying a life* and *living a death*:

...the Lord ... will neither let me die, nor let me live, but die an everlasting life, and live an everlasting death... (Donne, 1992, 319)

The paradox is, indeed, a puzzling case. It demonstrates a curious structure, by virtue of which the statement, though apparently possessing no reliable argumentative kernel, ultimately turns out implicit. It offers a vision of life in the context of vanity, of the mad universe where everything is upside down. The paradox displays "deliberate overtones of aesthetic and ethical anguish" (Adams, 1986, 272), and encodes the agony of discontent with the existence of a natural man who lives to die.

3. The paradox of *manifold deaths in the course of life*:

That which we call life is but *hebdomada mortium*, a week of death, seven periods of our life spent in dying, a dying seven times over; and there is an end. Our birth dies in infancy, and our infancy dies in youth, and youth, and the rest die in age, and age also dies and determines all ...

Our youth is worse than our infancy, and our age worse than our youth. Our youth is hungry and thirsty after those sins which our infancy knew not; and our age is sorry and angry, that it cannot pursue those sins which our youth did. And besides, all the way, so many deaths, that is, so many deadly calamities accompany every condition and every period of this life... (Donne, 1992, 405)

The chronology of the world has been a fascination of all times. During the Christian era, the model of seven ages of the world was systematized by St Augustine who followed the analogy with God's creation of the world that embraced seven days: God had created the world in six days, and on the seventh He took rest. St Augustine drew on the Greek tradition reworking it into a new system according to which both the world and humanity move through seven stages. In the context of human life, Donne takes these phases as degenerative ages. The new has no promise of rebirth, it suggests just a change for the worse. Marjorie Hope Nicolson claims that "to the seventeenth century laments over the old age and sickness of the world were not rhetoric but fact" (Nicolson, 1962, 107). Man and the world in their sickness were approaching the end. People believed in Martin Luther's statement proclaiming that "the world will perish shortly" (Luther, cited in Nicolson, 1962, 109), most probably, with themselves. In fact, Donne gives an entirely new treatment to quite a conventional idea. He speaks not so much of the seven ages that could offer permanent rebirth in each stage but rather of seven deaths of man. For him, even maturity is but a maturity in death. According to Donne's philosophy of life in death and death in life, each phase in human reality starts with re-dying, which is another proof that he finds no inspiration in nature ("no more nature"; Donne, 1992, 312) and ignores the importance of its

annual rebirth. He would prefer the natural course to be restricted to one season – the autumn. Spring is too painful a season as it is born out of winter and implies a promise of another winter. To his understanding, decay has spread over the globe, it is sick, “yea, dead, yea, putrefied” (*An Anatomy of the World: The First Anniversary*, line 238).

4. The paradox of *death in immortality*:

...behold this long day shutting up in such a night as shall never see light more, the night of death; in which, the deadliest pang of thy Death will be thine Immortality: In this especially shall thou die, that thou canst not die when thou art dead, but must live dead for ever... (Donne, 1992, 268)

As the quoted passage demonstrates, there are cases where Donne distinguishes himself as a paradoxer-equilibrist. To say more, he uses an extremely risky mode of communication displaying a movement on the blade of sense. The preacher manoeuvres perilously in the field of the homiletic stimulus-response strategy, yet remains safe. He knows what he wants, knows how to achieve it, and is a tremendous success. The audience may not detect any artificiality in the stream of his paradoxical speculation. Such a natural progress of the fabricated argument shocks one out of traditional habits of thinking. However, the syntactical structure remains traditional: *in this... that... when... but*. Donne sets up an enormous dialectical tension thus provoking a struggle for sense ‘in spite of nonsense’ on the part of the congregation. By the “blinding closeness of contrasts” (Brooks, 1981, 261), the sheer logical absurdity finally proves revelatory in that it breaks in illumination. The feeling of shared mortality allows an emotional involvement in a painful quest for certainty, absolute values, order, and safety. By irrecoverable death Donne means eternal damnation

and utter spiritual destruction without any promise of reconciliation. To some extent, it resembles an earthly existence that consists of seven periods of death. In Jewish religious symbolism, number seven points to “very much” or “many”. Thus, in Donne’s suggestion, human life is a long process of dying and suffering. However, affliction approaches an end in a natural death. What does he understand as life in the given context? Earthly life, full of suffering, comes to its end, i.e. physical death. However, damnation is unbearably endless. To avoid it, the preacher urges to seek reinterpretation in terms of ordinary life. It should be emphasized that the paradoxical technique crystallizes the Metaphysical as well as homiletic message. As it has already been mentioned, the paradox necessarily includes an element of semantic play.

5. The paradox of the *death of death*, which is best expressed in *Holy Sonnet 6*:

One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more, Death thou shalt die.

(Lines 13–14)

Living in finite universe where “Good seed degenerates and oft obeys / The soil’s disease, and into cockle strays” (*To the Countess of Bedford*, lines 49–50) and where change is “the fruitful mother of our appetite” (*Variety*, cited in: Nicolson, 1962, 188), Donne finds no happy satisfaction with limitation. The poet-preacher is enchanted by the aesthetics of infinity, by a new unity of life where death is excluded. The paradox of dead death suggests that death, as a principle of destruction, resides solely within the realm of time. Consequently, the finiteness of time determines the end of destruction. Thus, death, which is an extremely powerful sovereign over natural life, incurs cessation on itself as it has, to quote Dylan Thomas, “no dominion” (*And Death Shall Have no Dominion*, line 1). A

spiritual man, contrary to a natural man, “dies to live” (Simpson, 1962, 142): to destroy death is to bring to life. However, “out of mortal nature there is no way than by death” (Donne, 1992, 411). Moreover, death, though the greatest and most powerful destructor, undergoes disruption and final elimination. The personification that lies at the heart of the death paradox (a male figure in Donne’s mythopoetic treatment) makes the paradoxical vision iconographic.

Though in one of his sermons the Dean of St. Paul’s insists that “contradictions have falsehood, and so imply impotency” (*ibid.*, 375), still his most enjoyed method of argumentation is based, to use Malloch’s phrasing, on “drawing truth from error” (Malloch, 1956, 196). A similar (to some extent) technique, in the critic’s suggestion, could be found by Donne in Scholastic *quaestio disputata*, especially in Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica*, in medieval *sic et non* teaching and John of Salisbury whom the poet-preacher associated directly with the paradoxical mode of thinking. Traditionally, the disputed problem-article offers a title in a form of the question *whether this is that*, and the like. First come the objections to the statement in doubt which evoke uncertainty and then the *sic* arguments proceed.

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Finally, the article is crowned with the *I answer* section. Malloch suggests the idea that the Renaissance paradoxical scheme could have developed from the negation mode of *quaestio disputata*. The main difference, however, between the paradox and the disputed question lies in the stimulation of the recipient consciousness: “the reader of the disputed question participates as audience while the reader of the paradox as actor” (*ibid.*). The paradoxical mode encourages intellectual endeavour and thus is an active process leading to reconciliation of reason and faith. Moreover, the paradoxical text deprives the reader/listener of the possibility to guess a further progress of the narrative.

Donne’s other sources were the Patristic writings, especially the Biblical discourse that dissolves in paradox. The dominating paradox in *The Book of Job* – it is all true and all nonsense – could be taken as essential in exploring the relationship between the self and the world, the self and the divine. The final effect, as the above quoted Biblical passage claims, is that of negation which affirms. Donne’s sermons, as well as *The Book of Job*, open the fundamental paradox of faith: it is in spite of evil and death that people believe God rather than that they believe in God in order to explain why evil and death exist.

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JOHNO DONNE'O HOMILIJOS: PARADOKSAS KAIP TEOPoETINIO SUŽADINIMO INSTRUMENTAS

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Santrauka

Dažnai teopoetinio diskurso pagrindą sudaro paradoksinis naratyvinės raiškos būdas. Apskritai visose religinių diskursų formose, kur proto pastangomis yra siekiama pažinti ir išreikšti beribę ir amžinybę, prasmės judėjimo erdvė yra labirintinė.

Tiek poetiniai, tiek homiletiniai XVII a. anglų poeto ir pamokslininko Johno Donne'o tekstai rodo, kad metafizinis mąstymas ir juo grįstas sąmojis puikiausiai atskleidžia didžiųjų krikščioniškojo tikėjimo tiesų paradoksalumą.

Paradoksas kaip žanras yra vėlyvojo Renesanso skepsio vaisius. Donne'as šį žanrą mėgo nuo jaunystės, ilgainiui jis tobulai įvaldė paradoksinio mąstymo bei raiškos techniką. Poetui ir pamokslininkui intelektualinis išpuolis tampa labai svarbiu būdu, akimirksniu priverčiančiu skaitytoją ar klausytoją laikinai prarasti racionalią orientaciją, bet tik tam, kad ji atgimdama įgytų naują kokybę. Autorius suvokia, kad laikinas proto aptemdymas yra būtinas, kad būtų sužadintos prasmingos įžvalgos. Pamoksluose paradoksas virsta jėga, paviečiančia auditorijos valią ir išprovokuojančia amžinybės troškulį bei atgailos poreikį. Taiklūs paradoksalūs teiginiai padeda perprasti paslėptą kasdienybės banalumą ir ji

įveikti perkuriant tradicinius mąstymo stereotipus. Paradoksas parodo, kad net ir chaotiškiausioje medžiagoje yra galimos kūrybos užuomazgos, kitaip tariant, ir chaosose slypi tvarkos kodas.

Taikydamas paradokso techniką, Donne'as suvienija nesuderinamas idėjas galutiniam tikslui – tiesai – išsakyti. Individuali kūryba, grindžiama paradoksu – tai grumtynės su neišvengiamais žmonijos istorijos paradokais. Dažnai autorius tampa savotišku ekvilibristu, rizikingai judančiu per homiletinės stimulo ir atsako taktikos lauką. Tačiau kūrybinis talentas jam padeda aiškų loginį absurdą paversti netikėtai prasminga reveliacija.

Abejonės žmogaus gyvenimo slėpinių loginio suvokimo galimybės įkvėpė Donne'ą sukurti ekscentrišką, individualų, daugialypį mirties paradoksą. Pamoksluose aptinkama archetipinio „nėščios mirties“ paradokso subjektyvi metafizinė plėtotė: čia vyraujantis motyvas – tai gyvenimo perėjimas į mirtį ir mirties – į gyvenimą. Šis paradoksas yra dramatinė aukščiausių dvasinių siekių išraiška. Sukrečiantys ir drąsūs, iš loginių mąstymo vėžių verčiantys Johno Donne'o paradokasai skatina ieškoti dvasinio tobulumo per išganymo viltį.

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