Ethos. Kwartalnik Instytutu Jana Pawła II KUL
38(2025) nr 4(152) 241-261
DOI 10.12887/38-2025-4-152-14

Dorota GŁADKOWSKA*

COINCIDENTIA OPPOSITORUM REALIZED
John Donne's Life and Poetry, and the Paradox of Sanctity

Donne's poetry and life alike reveal a convergence of contradictions and paradoxes that integrate rational inquiry with sensory and emotional perception. His vision of sanctity is embedded in complex intratextual structures of communication, marked by intellectual rigor and conceptual originality. For centuries, he has been both celebrated and criticized for the density of his verse—what Gardner famously describes as the compression of meaning, analogy, and reference.

This essay explores the philosophical concept of coincidentia oppositorum as expressed in the poetry of John Donne (1572–1631) and selected episodes from his life. The study draws on Nicholas of Cusa's theological treatise *De Docta Ignorantia* (1440),[1] where he considers the idea of unity within disparity in the divine order. For Cusanus, the convergence of opposites reveals the divine imprint upon the paradoxical nature of reality.[2] The notion of such paradoxical unity, later echoed by Thomas Browne in *Religio Medici* (1642)[3] and by Thomas Traherne in *Centuries of Meditations* (c. 1674),[4] remains underexplored in relation to Donne's less overtly theological poetic vision of sanctity.

Rooted in his historical and religious milieu, Donne's outlook is marked by distinctive complexity, encoded across both his sacred and so-called secular verse. Positioned at the heart of the metaphysical school, his poetry exemplifies what Samuel Johnson described in the *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (1779)[5] as "a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult

* Dr Dorota Gładkowska – Wydział Humanistyczny, Uniwersytet Warmińsko-Mazurski w Olsztynie, e-mail: dorota.gladkowska@uwm.edu.pl, ORCID 0000-0002-5223-7662 [pełna nota o Autorce na końcu numeru].

[1] See N i c h o l a s of C u s a, *On Learned Ignorance*, ed. and trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: A.J. Benning Press, 1985).

[2] See ibidem, 5–6, 8–10, 11, 65–67, 89. On the concept of coincidentia oppositorum see "Translator's Introduction," in Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, 7–15.

[3] See Thomas B r o w n e, *Religio Medici: The Religion of a Doctor*, in *The Prose of Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. Norman J. Endicott (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1967), 1–89.

[4] See Thomas T r a h e r n e, *Centuries of Meditations*, ed. Bertram Dobell (London: The Editor, 1908).

[5] See Samuel J o h n s o n, *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets, with Critical Observations on Their Works*, vols. 1–3 (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1854).

resemblances in things apparently unlike."[6] Yet Johnson also criticized Donne's poetry, having observed that it forcibly yokes "the most heterogeneous ideas.[7] Indeed, Donne's verse thrives on opposition and paradox, uniting intellectual rigor with spiritual inquiry. As Grierson noted, it seeks to articulate "the role assigned to the human spirit in the great drama of existence."[8] The motif of sanctity in Donne's work resonates with the paradoxical nature of human experience—fundamentally shaped by the tension between opposites.

This essay traces how Donne's conception of sanctity is constructed through textual interplay and poetic form, drawing on theological and philosophical codes as well as literary convention. It argues that the motif of sanctity in Donne's work is revealed through a deliberate integration of seemingly irreconcilable realms—conjoining domains traditionally viewed as distinct or antithetical. Through close readings and selected biographical insights, the essay proposes that Donne's poetic theology must be understood across his oeuvre—religious and secular alike—and in the context of his complex personal history.

As George Parfitt has observed, "a consistent attitude or set of attitudes in a writer's work is revealing"[9]—psychologically and socially. Superficial readings of Donne risk obscuring the structural intricacies and intentional complexities at play. His analytical vision—rooted in logical paradox and resistant to doctrinal or social reduction—demands a mode of reading attentive to contradiction as a source of insight rather than failure. Likewise, a more integrated understanding of Donne as a historical figure emerges when the traditionally separate spheres of the sacred and the profane in his life are recognized as mutually informing.

Donne's integration of spiritual and corporeal experience constitutes not only a literary method but a philosophical stance. His work resists dualism, embracing contradiction as a site of truth—a form of intellectual and spiritual courage resonant with both early modern metaphysics and contemporary anthropological thought. This study does not assert Donne's sanctity in a doctrinal sense but examines the paradoxical constellation of qualities in his life and poetry as indicative of a distinct vision of spiritual integrity. In this light, Donne's work realizes the Cusan idea of coincidentia oppositorum, wherein opposites and paradoxes reveal, rather than obscure, divine order.

---

[6] See ibidem, 20. See also Harold B l o o m, "Introduction," in *John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets*, eds. Harold Bloom and Michael G. Cornelius (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008), xvi.

[7] J o h n s o n, *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, 20. See also "Introduction by Harold Bloom," 2; Helen G a r d n e r, "Introduction," in *The Metaphysical Poets*, ed. Helen Gardner (n.p.: Penguin, 1982), 15–29.

[8] H. J. C. G r i e r s o n, "Metaphysical Poetry," in *Seventeenth-Century English Poetry: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. William R. Keast (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 4.

[9] George P a r f i t t, *John Donne: A Literary Life* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 32.

THE MOTIF OF SANCTITY IN DONNE'S VERSE
THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE

It seems natural to begin the search for the motif of sanctity—or the ways in which it is envisioned in Donne's poetry—with his *Holy Sonnets*, also known as "Divine Meditations."[10] As in George Herbert's *The Temple*,[11] the titles already suggest sanctity as a central theme. Yet, although the sonnets are saturated with biblical allusions, among them recurring images of the Trinity and of Christ crucified and resurrected,[12] the speaker openly declares himself a sinner. Paralyzed by an overwhelming fear of death, he confesses a lack of faith, hope, and love:

> Despaire behind, and Death before doth cast
> Such terrour, and my feebled flesh doth wast
> By sinne in it....[13]

Though Donne's sonnets are grounded in the core tenets of Christianity, they are equally permeated by uncertainty and spiritual struggle. At this stage, the motif of sanctity appears faint—if not altogether absent.

What emerges across Donne's religious poetry is the speaker's desperate plea for divine assistance and his compulsive return to the question of salvation—to analyze it, to seek confirmation, to test its authenticity. This dynamic is particularly evident in "A Hymne to God the Father":

> I have a sinne of feare, that when I have spunne
> My last thred, I shall perish on the shore;
> But sweare by thy self, that at my death thy sonne
> Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore;
> And, having done that, Thou haste done,
> I feare no more [14]

---

[10] See John D o n n e, "Devine Meditations," in *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, vol. 7, part 1, *The Holy Sonnets*, ed. G. A. Stringer et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 5–26. This volume includes two sequences of twelve sonnets each, designated as authorial: the Original Sequence and the Revised Sequence, and the nineteen-poem Westmoreland Sequence.

[11] See George H e r b e r t, *The Temple*, ed. Edgar C. S. Gibson (London: Methuen & Co., 1899).

[12] On such imagery in Donne's sermons, see Thomas O. S l o a n e, "Dr. Donne and the Image of Christ," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 24, no. 2 (2006): 187–216.

[13] D o n n e, "Devine Meditations," 1, lines 6–8, 5.

[14] John D o n n e, "A Hymne to God the Father," lines 13–18, in *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, ed. C. A. Patrides (London and Melbourne: Dent, 1988), 490–91.

Notably, these texts maintain a distinct level of address. While confessing his sins and fears, Donne's speaker consistently directs his words to God. More importantly, Donne's Revised Sequence of the *Holy Sonnets* concludes with a reminder of Christ's ultimate commandment:

> Thy Lawes Abridgment, and thy last command
> Is all but Loue, Oh lett that last will stand.
> *Finis*[15]

Thus, the sequence may be read not only as a prayer but also as a dramatic monologue. In this respect, the *Holy Sonnets* clearly echo the tradition of English medieval religious lyric. What is distinctive about this poetry is that the question of salvation unfolds through an intertextual—at times, dialogic—interaction (within and across poems) between the human and the divine; that is, between the individual speaker and the responsive God, in a relationship marked by intimacy.

As Barbara Kowalik observes, this phenomenon becomes most evident when early English religious lyrics are read comparatively—in pairs or thematic clusters—revealing a complex network of textual relations.[16] Donne's *Holy Sonnets*, drawing on this tradition, offer a meditative space through which aspects of sanctity may be discerned. Within this space, the motif of sanctity is closely tied—significantly for the argument advanced here—to the divine commandment of love, which ultimately resolves the speaker's inner struggle and brings the dramatic monologue to a close that enacts a dialogic relationship, even though only the speaker's voice is heard.

Donne's poetry and life alike reveal a convergence of contradictions and paradoxes that integrate rational inquiry with sensory and emotional perception. His vision of sanctity is embedded in complex intratextual structures of communication, marked by intellectual rigor and conceptual originality. For centuries, he has been both celebrated and criticized for the density of his verse—what Gardner famously describes as the compression of meaning, analogy, and reference.[17]

DEFINING SANCTITY
HISTORICAL AND LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES

The concept of sanctity—laden with diverse meanings and cultural resonances—needs identification and categorization. A comparative analysis of

---

[15] John D o n n e, "Devine Meditations," 12, lines 14–15, 26.

[16] See Barbara K o w a l i k, *Betwixt "engelaunde" and "englene londe": Dialogic Poetics in Early English Religious Lyric* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 31–91.

[17] See G a r d n e r, "Introduction," 16–20.

dictionary definitions reveals a distinction between formally institutionalized sanctity and its informal counterpart, which operates within everyday social life and is frequently perceived subjectively. Historical research into the English language indicates that this semantic division has remained largely consistent since the medieval period.

Already in early Middle English, the term "saint" was used in both formal and informal contexts. On the one hand, it referred to "[a] person formally recognized by the Church as living with God in heaven after death and regarded as eligible for veneration by the faithful; spec. a canonized person."[18] On the other, a more colloquial usage of the term in Middle English described "a very good or long-suffering person."[19] The adjective "sacred," meanwhile, denoted a close association with God or religion, but from late Middle English onwards, it also came to express a broader sense of reverence and esteem.[20]

Of particular interest is the observation that its association with protection "by religious sanction or reverence from violation, interference [and] incursion"[21] emerged only in the mid-sixteenth century. Although this semantic layer had entered the language by Donne's lifetime, it would still have been relatively recent and perhaps not yet fully conventionalized in his usage. Aside from this nuance, however, the broader meanings of both "saint" and "sacred" were already well established—and have remained largely consistent since.

Another significant aspect of sanctity is "the quality of being sacred,"[22] particularly in relation to "sacred obligations [and] feelings"[23]—concepts that entered the English lexicon in the seventeenth century and came to encompass the notion of protection from violation or incursion. In this regard, Donne's late sixteenth-century poetry may be regarded as innovative—not only in its portrayal of earthly love as a sanctifying force but also in its fusion of spiritual and corporeal realities, exemplified by the oft-cited metaphor of the "mariage bed, and mariage temple."[24] The phrase "sanctity of human life" or "sanctity of marriage," now commonplace in both religious and secular discourse,[25] appears in Donne's work within a highly original poetic context.

Importantly, Donne's poetry resists modern tendencies to separate the religious and the social dimensions of sanctity. Whereas contemporary dictionar-

---

[18] *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, s.v. "saint," ed. Lesley Brown, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 2669.

[19] Ibidem.

[20] See ibidem, s.v. "sacred," 2663.

[21] Ibidem, 2663.

[22] Ibidem, s.v. "sanctity," 2680.

[23] Ibidem.

[24] John D o n n e, "The Flea," line 13, in *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, 47.

[25] See Cambridge Dictionary, s.v. "sanctity," https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/sanctity.

ies distinguish between religious significance and the special importance of traditional institutions**,**[26] Donne portrays these aspects as inextricably intertwined.

CANONIZATION OF LOVE

This entangled relationship is exemplified in "The Canonization*,*" a poem in the secular *Songs and Sonnets*, whose title nonetheless evokes the formalized religious concept of sanctity. While the poem centers on society's perception of the lovers, the canonization it proposes stems not from ecclesiastical authority but from the intrinsic logic of love itself, unfolding in tandem with the deepening of their bond. The speaker—a lover—proclaims: "all shall approve / Us *Canoniz'd* for Love."[27]

Here, the social dimension of sanctity comes to the fore, merging with religious connotations and, ultimately, with the lovers' physical and spiritual union: "we two being one"[28]; "wee are made such by love."[29] The poem affirms the sanctifying power of love and presents "lover-saints"[30] who seek not merely recognition, but reverence. Canonization—though a religious rite—becomes a means of affirming a relationship that is personal, spiritual, and socially resonant. Whether metaphorical or literal, the term suggests that love, when authentically experienced, partakes of the sacred.

By reconfiguring sanctity beyond institutional boundaries, Donne demonstrates intellectual and spiritual courage, urging readers to recognize the sacred in domains traditionally outside official sanction. "The Canonization" redefines holiness, presenting the lovers' unity as spiritually significant and a vehicle for immortality. In the third stanza, the speaker proclaims the lovers' resurrection:

> The Phœnix ridle hath more wit
> By us, we two being one, are it.
> . . . . . .
> Wee dye and rise the same, and prove
> Mysterious by this love.[31]

[26] See ibidem.

[27] D o n n e, "The Canonization," lines 35–36, in *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, 58.

[28] Ibidem, line 24.

[29] Ibidem, line 19.

[30] Joanna B u r z y ń s k a, "An Unnoticed Aspect of the Argument: A New Interpretation of 'The Canonization' by John Donne," *Linguistica et Anglica Gedaniensia* 1 (1978): 135.

[31] D o n n e, "The Canonization," lines 23–27, 58.

By portraying the Phoenix and the lovers as inextricably bound**,** the speaker re-imagines the myth to convey his core message: the sacred firebird is reborn both spiritually and physically. This evokes one of Donne's *Holy Sonnets***,** central to the Revised Sequence, in which the speaker confronts and defies personified Death:

> One short sleepe past, wee wake æternallye
> And Death shall bee noe more. Death, thou shalt dye.[32]

The motif of the inseparability of body and soul—vividly depicted in "The Canonization," a love poem with marked erotic undertones—re-emerges here in a religious context, through the "pleasure"[33] linked to the "rest of their bones, and Soules deliuerie."[34] In another of Donne's *Holy Sonnets*, this theme develops into a vision of "nomberless infinities / Of Soules"[35] that "arise, arise / From Death"[36] and return to their "scattred Bodies."[37] Read intertextually, these poems blur the boundary between the secular and the sacred in Donne's work, constructing a literary space in which the sacred and the profane converge and illuminate each other.

The barrier between the sacred and the profane dissolves in the final stanza of "The Canonization*,*" where the speaker invokes all "lovers-saints" as intermediaries between humanity and God:

> You whom reverend love
> Made one anothers hermitage;
> . . . . . .
> Beg from above
> A patterne of our love.[38]

Donne's poem both references and transcends the traditional Christian concept of sanctity. It activates both the horizontal and the vertical axes of human experience, encircling them with the divine framework. Though centered on earthly love, it emphasizes that love's unifying power—the sacred union of

---

[32] John D o n n e, "Devine Meditations," 6, lines 12–13, 23.
[33] Ibidem, line 6.
[34] Ibidem, line 8.
[35] John D o n n e, "Devine Meditations," 4, line 3, 22.
[36] Ibidem, lines 2–3.
[37] Ibid., line 4. For a discussion of Donne's treatment of body and soul in the context of the Protestant and Calvinist thought, see Ramie T a r g o f f, *John Donne, Body and Soul* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 106–29.
[38] D o n n e, "The Canonization," lines 37–45, 59

bodies and souls—warrants elevation. The poem calls for this "patterne" to be shared, rendering the lovers-saints part of a "neutrall" immortal being:

> So, to one neutrall thing both sexes fit,
> Wee dye and rise the same, and prove
> Mysterious by this love.[39]

This "neutrall" being represents the union of all elevated lovers-saints—a theme echoed in "The good-morrow,"[40] where love "mixt equally"[41] ("If our two loves be one"[42]) elevates them to the mystical "every where,"[43] and in "The undertaking,"[44] where true love transcends gendered distinctions in favor of essential unity:

> And dare love that, and say so too,
> And forget the Hee and Shee.[45]

Paradoxically, the speaker in "The undertaking" asserts that the secret of such love must be openly declared (which introduces a social dimension) and carefully concealed ("this love ... / From prophane men you hide"[46]).

Unexpectedly, in Donne's religious poem concluding the Revised Sequence of the *Holy Sonnets*,[47] God does—intertextually and indirectly—respond to the passionate plea: "Beg from above / A patterne of our love," with a divine command that affirms the simplicity of essential love to which all are called: "Thy Lawes Abridgment, and thy last command / Is all but Loue, Oh lett that last will stand."[48] This forms a thematic bridge between Donne's secular and religious poetry, whose symbolic weight deepens when this unity is seen as realized through communication with God.

Notably, Donne draws on tradition by invoking the New Testament doctrine which proclaims that God is love: "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.... God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 Jn 4: 8–16, KJV). Building on biblical sources, he elaborates this theme in a religious sonnet where he explores the analogy between divine and human love through an eroticized image of the spouse of Christ:

---

[39] Ibidem, lines 25–27, 58.

[40] John D o n n e, "The good-morrow," in *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, 48–49.

[41] Ibidem, line 19, 49.

[42] Ibidem, line 20.

[43] Ibidem, line 11.

[44] See John D o n n e, "The undertaking," in *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, 52–53.

[45] Ibidem, lines 19–20, 52.

[46] Ibidem, lines 21–22, 53.

[47] See John D o n n e, "Devine Meditations," 12, 26.

[48] Ibidem, lines 13–14, 26.

Betray kind husband thy Spouse to our Sights,
And let myne amorous Soule court thy mild Dove,
Who is most trew, and pleasing to thee, then
When She'is embrac'd and open to most Men.[49]

While provocative, this imagery expresses the paradoxical yet universal nature of love: originating from a singular divine source but extending to many. The motif of Christ's spouse, central to this vision, recurs beyond Donne's poetry, notably in his sermons, where he states: "The Church is the spouse of Christ."[50] In doing so, Donne re-engages with foundational Christian symbolism. The analogy between human love and the divine covenant finds a mature theological precedent in the Song of Solomon, which biblical scholarship acknowledges as "a ripe fruit of the theological reflection of the prophets ... on Yahweh's nuptial relationship with the chosen people."[51]

Given Donne's theological concerns,[52] his deliberate and nuanced integration of the Old and New Testament conceptions of divine and human love reflects a sophisticated engagement with the Christian doctrine. Through his poetry, Donne presents a distinctive artistic vision, reinterpreting the biblical message as a personal conception of immortality accomplished through sacred and universal love, wherein body and soul are "intricately blended."[53] Within this framework, the sexual, social, and religious dimensions of existence are not isolated but mutually formative and affirming.

SACRED UNION AND PARADOX IN DONNE'S EXPLORATION OF LOVE

The already discussed phrase "mariage bed, and mariage temple" occupies a central place in "The Flea," a poem typically read as comic or seductive, rarely as religious.[54] In the poem the speaker uses playful arguments to persuade a woman:

---

[49] John D o n n e, "Holy Sonnets" (Westmoreland Sequence), 18, in *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, vol. 7, part 1, *The Holy Sonnets*, lines 11–14, 19.

[50] John D o n n e, *The Sermons of John Donne*, eds. G. R. Potter and E. M. Simpson, vol. 7 (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1959), 325, 409.

[51] "Wstęp do Pieśni nad Pieśniami," in *Pismo Święte Starego i Nowego Testamentu*, ed. Tomasz Bielski and Wacław Markowski SAC (Poznań and Warszawa: Pallottinum, 1971), 747. The translation is my own.

[52] See Herbert J. C. G r i e r s o n, "Introduction," in *The Poems of John Donne*, ed. Herbert Grierson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945), xxvii.

[53] Ibidem, xviii.

[54] See Theresa M. D i P a s q u a l e, *Literature and Sacrament: The Sacred and the Secular in John Donne* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1999), 173–86.

Marke but this flea ...
. . . . . .
in this flea our two bloods mingled bee;
... this cannot be said
A sinne, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead.[55]

However, the imperative "Marke but this flea" invites a deeper meditation on sacred love, sin, and marriage.

Donne emphasizes the number three: "three lives in one flea,"[56] evoking the Holy Trinity[57] and their sacred union:

This flea is you and I, and this
Our mariage bed, and mariage temple is;
. . . . . .
Though use make you apt to kill mee,
Let not to that, self-murder added bee,
And sacrilege, three sinnes in killing three.[58]

The flea becomes a synecdoche for the lovers' indivisible, sanctified relationship: "This flea is you and I," where they are "more then maryed."[59] As mingled blood signified consummation, the act is framed as transcending social norms and forming a stronger covenant.

The phrase "our mariage bed, and mariage temple" fuses sexual, social, and religious registers into a single metaphor. The "bed" and the "temple" stand as equals—both are sacred spaces of union. Thus, the lovers' world is enclosed within a sacred domain where love is "mixt equally": an alchemical ideal echoed elsewhere in Donne's work.[60] The speaker's dramatic appeals: "Oh stay,"[61] "Let not to that,"[62] elevate the argument from seduction to theology. Killing the flea is framed as a triple sin—sacrilege, self-murder, and murder—destroying the sacred union of lovers and its eternal promise.

Donne condenses considerable theology into three stanzas, culminating in the implied killing of the flea, which prompts the speaker's accusatory response:

Cruell and sodaine, hast thou since
Purpled thy naile, in blood of innocence?[63]

---

[55] D o n n e, "*The Flea," lines* 1–6, 47.

[56] Ibidem, line 10.

[57] On Donne's poetic code, see Julia M. W a l k e r, "Donne's Words Taught in Numbers," *Studies in Philology* 84, no. 1 (1987): 48 and 56.

[58] D o n n e, "The Flea," lines 12–18, 47–48.

[59] Ibidem, line 11, 47.

[60] See, e.g., "What ever dyes, was not mixt equally." D o n n e, "*The good-morrow,"* line 19, 49.

[61] D o n n e, "*The Flea,"* line 10, 47.

[62] Ibidem, line 17, 48.

[63] Ibidem, lines 19–20.

The speaker casts the woman's act as a form of desecration. The flea, once trivial, now bears a sacred meaning; killing it becomes not just a rejection of seduction, but a rupture of a sanctified union. The word "nail" alludes to Christ's crucifixion, an image that risks blasphemy to elevate erotic loss into spiritual violence. Such a fusion of the sacred and the profane is typical of Donne's metaphysical poetics, where body and soul are bound in a paradoxical unity.

"The Flea" reflects the Renaissance belief in the link between the microcosm and the macrocosm, echoed in Browne's *Religio Medici*, where the smallest insects are said to reveal "the wisedome of their Maker"[64] and the "Cosmography of my selfe."[65] Browne notes that "these narrow Engines"[66] contain "curious Mathematicks,"[67] offering in miniature what others seek in vast volumes.[68] Similarly, Donne's flea condenses physical, spiritual, and social dimensions into a compact emblem, thus capturing the baroque tension between reduction and expansion.

The poem's symmetrical three-stanza (each nine lines long) structure further enacts this tripartite balance, corresponding to the three facets of love: physical, religious, and social. This aligns with "The Canonization," where the speaker-lover insists that their sanctity in love be publicly acknowledged:

> And if no piece of Chronicle wee prove,
> We'll build in sonnets pretty roomes;
> . . . . . .
> And by these hymnes, all shall approve
> Us *Canoniz'd* for Love**.**[69]

Donne links the lovers' elevated status to traditional poetic forms, which they paradoxically repurpose to legitimize a new vision of sanctity. Tradition is transformed: "sonnets" become "hymnes," merging the secular and the sacred. Yet poetry remains secondary: valid only "if no piece of Chronicle wee prove." The poem privileges a lived, publicly witnessed record of love. The lovers must create their own "Chronicle," revealing sanctity through experience and the immortality it confers: "Wee can dye by it if not live by love."[70]

This poetic vision is rooted in the idea of the divine coincidentia oppositorum, where "the Minimum is the Maximum"[71] and "Infinite Oneness is the

---

[64] B r o w n e, *Religio Medici*, 21.
[65] Ibidem.
[66] Ibidem.
[67] Ibidem.
[68] See N i c h o l a s of C u s a, *On Learned Ignorance*, 8–9.
[69] D o n n e, "Canonization," lines 31–36, 58.
[70] Ibidem, line 28.
[71] N i c h o l a s of C u s a, *On Learned Ignorance*, 25.

enfolding of all things,"[72] where God is both the center and the infinite circumference, in a *circular* theology in which the opposites are reconciled in a divine unity.[73] Donne translates this paradox into a poetic form: his verse holds the oppositions rather than resolves them. The microcosmic images he uses reflect cosmic truths, and his successive stanzas condense the structures that mirror the complexity of the entire poetic sequence, thereby evoking divine intricacy. In Poulet's words, Donne's baroque imagination "finds a meeting place"[74] where "contrary movements cross one another."[75] His poetry becomes a site of convergence: of body and soul, science and mystery, the secular and the sacred. And if *sacred* is understood as being close to the divine, then Donne's poetic creation, structured on patterns of the divine order and rich in such iconicity, aspires to being close to the divine both in its form and in its content.

This synthesis spans time: Donne fuses tradition with innovation, challenging literary boundaries with deliberate boldness.[76] Nowhere is this more evident than in the paradoxical title *Holy Sonnets*, which unites the form of courtly love poetry with religious devotion. Here, sanctity becomes a space where opposites coexist. Though Donne's oeuvre ranges from sensual lyrics to sacred hymns, this diversity conceals a deeper unity. Bloom notes, that "the wonder of Donne's poetry is its unitary nature,"[77] and it is precisely this nature that is visible in "The Extasie"[78] as well as in the "Hymne to God my God, in my sicknesse"[79]: works shaped by "the same poetic mind."[80]

NAVIGATING THE PARADOX INTERTWINING THE SACRED AND THE SECULAR IN DONNE'S BIOGRAPHY

Donne's life reflects the paradoxes of his poetry, where appearances often deceive. His turbulent path to the divine service blended the sacred and

[72] Ibidem, 65.

[73] See Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, *Late Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2003), 236. See also Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, 8–9.

[74] Georges Poulet, *The Metamorphoses of the Circle*, trans. Carley Dawson and Elliott Coleman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), 19.

[75] Ibidem, 25.

[76] See Di Pasquale, *Literature and Sacrament*, 1, 173–86.

[77] Bloom, "Introduction," xvi.

[78] See Donne, "The Extasie," in *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, 81–102.

[79] See Donne, "Hymne to God my God, in my sicknesse," in *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, 488–89.

[80] Bloom, "Introduction," xvi.

the secular, mixing eroticism with sacrifice in a precarious tension between hope and despair.[81] This negotiation of opposites reveals a deeply personal spirituality, distinct from a formal ecclesiastical standing. As William Minto observed, Donne "is now numbered among [the] greatest divines"[82] of the Anglican Church, while his first biographer, Isaac Walton, attributed his ordination to "a higher hand,"[83] emphasizing both his piety and the poetic depth of his sermons.[84] These observations confirm that Donne's life and work form an inseparable whole, warranting continued scholarly attention.

Yet attempts to pinpoint sanctity in Donne's biography leave room for uncertainty. Unlike George Herbert, whose clerical life reinforces his religious poetry, Donne's legacy is more contested. Minto noted: "The superficial facts of his life are so incongruous as to be an irresistible provocation to inquiry. What are we to make of the fact that the founder of a licentious school of erotic poetry, a man acknowledged to be the greatest wit in a licentious Court, with an early bias in matters of religion towards Roman Catholicism, entered the Church of England when he was past middle age and is now numbered among its greatest divines? Was he a convert like St. Augustine, or an indifferent worldling like Talleyrand? Superficial appearances are rather in favour of the latter supposition."[85]

Donne's biographers highlight two pivotal moments: his secret marriage in 1601 and his ordination in 1615. Both reveal an ongoing inner conflict between spiritual, social, and physical realms, embodying the paradoxes central to his life and work. His marriage fulfilled love but cost him career and status; his ordination brought advancement but was soon shadowed by grief after his wife's death in 1616.[86] As Anna Brownell Jameson noted, "Dr Donne is ... interesting for his matrimonial history."[87]

The complexity of Donne's *persona* complicates any straightforward reading of sanctity: he was "not dissolute, but very neat; a great Visitor of Ladies, a great frequenter of Playes, a great writer of conceited Verses,"[88] a Catholic

[81] See P a r f i t t, *John Donne: A Literary Life*, 49–50.

[82] William M i n t o, "John Donne" (1880), quoted in *John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets*, 8.

[83] See Isaac W a l t o n, *The Lives*, ed. George Routledge (London: Routledge, 1888), 42.

[84] See ibidem, 38–48.

[85] M i n t o, "John Donne" (1880), quoted in *John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets*, 8.

[86] See W a l t o n, *The Lives*, 34–37, 62. For a broader contextual overview, see W a l t o n, *The Lives*, 27–62; Robert C. B a l d, *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 27–131; John C a r e y, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 10–71.

[87] Anna B r o w n e l l J a m e s o n, *The Loves of the Poets* (1829), quoted in *John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets*, 7.

[88] Richard B a k e r, *A Chronicle of the English Kings* (1641), quoted in *John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets*, 7.

convert who became Dean of St Paul's,[89] and "the greatest preacher of his age."[90] As Augustus Jessopp observed, Donne's sermon was "the first missionary sermon printed in the English language"[91] and "as a preacher at this time Donne stood almost alone."[92] Charismatic and intellectually daring, Donne sought to reconcile opposing spheres in both life and literature, embodying tensions rather than certainties.

This notable parallelism between Donne's philosophical background, biography, and poetry illuminates his controversial choices. For nearly three decades, he pursued a political career at court: educated at Oxford and Cambridge, well-travelled in Italy and Spain,[93] a Catholic loyal to the English crown, volunteer in campaigns against Spain, lawyer, Member of Parliament, diplomat—all "to maximise opportunities"[94] within the royal sphere.[95] Often seen as a conformist with a large ego who objectified women in his poetry, Donne ultimately sacrificed this promising path for love.[96] His secret marriage to a sixteen-year-old without consent violated both canon law and social norms,[97] bringing physical, social, and spiritual realms into conflict. A man of "immense learning,"[98] known for his ambition and "the intense depth and wide scope of his thought,"[99] Donne appears to have made a conscious sacrifice, choosing love over political service.[100] Parfitt suggests he may have hoped others would forgive this "treason," recognizing it as a sincere valuation of love rather than rejection of duty.[101] The artistic temperament inherited from his mother—the daughter of dramatist John Haywood—seems to have prevailed in Donne's life.[102] Ultimately, he prioritized love, an attitude that, paradoxically, led to a loss: his wife's premature death in childbirth.[103]

With respect to sanctity, Donne's sacrifice of his political career for love deserves acknowledgment. Yet he did not forsake his social standing to openly

---

[89] See "John Donne (1572–1631)," in *John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets*, 1–2.

[90] Edmund G o s s e, *The Life and Letters of John Donne* (1899), quoted in *John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets*, 10.

[91] Augustus J e s s o p p, *Dictionary of National Biography* (1888), quoted in *John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets*, 13.

[92] Ibidem.

[93] See W a l t o n, *The Lives*, 27–31.

[94] P a r f i t t, *John Donne: A Literary Life*, 5.

[95] See ibidem 3–6 and "John Donne (1572–1631)," 1–2.

[96] See W a l t o n, *The Lives*, 34–37.

[97] See P a r f i t t, *John Donne: A Literary Life*, 41; B a l d, *John Donne: A Life*, 130–31.

[98] M i n t o, "John Donne," quoted in *John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets*, 8.

[99] Ibidem.

[100] See P a r f i t t, *John Donne: A Literary Life*, 6 and 130.

[101] Ibidem, 130.

[102] See G r i e r s o n, "Introduction," xiv.

[103] See B a l d, *John Donne: A Life*, 23–27; P a r f i t t, *John Donne: A Literary Life*, 49–50.

defend his Catholic heritage. Although this prioritization of love might ennoble him, Parfitt argues that pragmatism—amid social pressure, financial hardship, and necessity—likely motivated his apostasy.[104] Born into a family of Catholic martyrs who "had suffered religious persecution and exile,"[105] Donne may have appeared a renegade to his contemporaries. He seemed to disregard the martyrdom of his mother's relative—Thomas More, his refusal to accept the Henrician schism, the execution of priest Thomas Heywood, and the death of his brother Henry, "arrested for harbouring a Catholic priest."[106] Thus, Donne abandoned the faith of his devout mother, relatives, and early Jesuit influences.[107] Unlike his kin who died for their faith, Donne not only renounced Catholicism but, as a crown-appointed priest, used his intellect and oratory to advocate state control over religion, including sermon censorship. In doing so, he significantly "contributed to the construction of a post-Reformation Church,"[108] becoming "one of [its] foundational voices."[109] This raises a vital question: was Donne "some kind of apostate from Catholicism or ... a crypto-Catholic for reasons of subversion or ambition"?[110]

A superficial reading of Donne's verses might suggest that he was merely sarcastic or cynical. Likewise, his move to the Anglican priesthood often appears cynical, thereby obscuring its complexities.[111] To propagate sacred love, Donne used poetry and sought to complete the "Chronicle" of his life. Married secretly and ordained in public glory,[112] he conveyed an intense theological message in his Anglican sermons as vigorously as in his earlier Catholic-period poetry, which still awaits full decoding. His poetic philosophy, once revealed, sheds light on his life and seemingly illogical choices.

Given his political ambitions and intellect, alongside "the anti-Catholic legislation"[113] and mounting financial pressures, it seems reductive to attribute Donne's late entry into the Church of England solely to pragmatism. His Catholic background, "with Jesuits among his relatives and executions on record," placed him in a paradoxical position—both precarious and potentially glorious—facing risks of imprisonment and death, alongside "the possibil-

---

[104] See P a r f i t t, *John Donne: A Literary Life*, 11.

[105] "John Donne (1572–1631)," 1.

[106] P a r f i t t, *John Donne: A Literary Life*, 7.

[107] See ibidem, 10 and 56; "John Donne (1572–1631),"1; B a l d, *John Donne: A Life*, 23.

[108] Jeanne S h a m i, *John Donne and Conformity in Crisis in the Late Jacobean Pulpit* (Rochester: D.S. Brewer, 2003), 2.

[109] Ibidem, 283.

[110] P a r f i t t, *John Donne: A Literary Life*, 11.

[111] See ibidem, 54, 41–43.

[112] See ibidem, 40, 53–54.

[113] Ibidem, 9.

ity of the religious glory of martyrdom."[114] For a man reputed for his ego, this delayed conversion posed a double dilemma: trading long-endured social disadvantage at court for contempt within Catholic circles.[115] By adopting a measured, flexible approach, Donne rejected both the inheritance of Catholic religious glory and the temptation of a hasty conversion.

As a "Catholic in the Elizabethan state,"[116] Donne sought to reconcile religious faith with secular ambition, aiming for social acceptance "as a loyal English gentleman."[117] Parfitt suggests that, for years, Donne may have "exemplif[ied] Catholic loyalty to the state rather than conformity to the state religion."[118] After his marriage, he unsuccessfully pursued a court career for over a decade, persistently refusing ecclesiastical office despite numerous offers, while continuing theological studies amid financial hardship.[119] Only after he was elected to Parliament in 1614, did he, paradoxically, abandon his secular ambitions and take holy orders.[120] His motives were unlikely purely pragmatic. Sir Richard Baker confirms in *A Chronicle of the Kings of England* (1641) that Donne was then ready to "become so rare a Preacher."[121] Donne's life shows how integrity and self-interest can coincide,[122] embodying a bold embrace of contradiction central to spiritual and artistic truth.

*

This essay has explored a poetic and personal vision in which sanctity is not defined by uniform piety but by the dynamic coexistence of diverse, God-given aspects of human life. Donne sought to balance human eroticism, social duty, and religious devotion—an effort that shapes both his writing and his lived experience. Within the limits of his time, he cultivated a broadly Christian outlook[123] marked by theological moderation and belief in the essential unity

[114] Ibidem, 10. See B a l d, *John Donne: A Life*, 42.

[115] See Patrick M c G r a t h, *Papists and Puritans under Elizabeth I* (London: Blandford Press, 1967), 100–101; John M i l l e r, *Popery and Politics in England 1660–1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University. Press, 1973), 52–53.

[116] P a r f i t t, *John Donne: A Literary Life*, 10.

[117] Ibidem, 12.

[118] Ibidem, 11.

[119] See ibidem, 60. See also B a l d, *John Donne: A Life*, 290.

[120] See P a r f i t t, *John Donne: A Literary Life*, 60.

[121] B a k e r, *A Chronicle of the English Kings*, quoted in *John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets*, 6.

[122] See P a r f i t t, *John Donne: A Literary Life*, 12.

[123] See S h a m i, *John Donne and Conformity in Crisis in the Late Jacobean Pulpit* 281; D i P a s q u a l e, *Literature and Sacrament*, 1–26; T a r g o f f, *John Donne, Body and Soul*, 1–24.

of all Christian denominations. His "lack of interest in non-essentials"[124] and view that "all churches have departed from one primitive Church"[125] is clear in "Pseudo-Martyr,"[126] where he expresses his "easines, to afford a sweete and gentle Interpretation, to all professors of Christian Religion, if they shake not the Foundation."[127]

Donne's vision of sanctity is encapsulated in his letter "To the Countess of Bedford. On New Year's Day," where he makes an encouragement: "turn to God....// He will best teach you, how you should lay out / His stock of beauty,"[128] and defended in the opening line of "The Canonization": "For God-sake hold your tongue, and let me love."[129] His theology and poetry articulate a paradoxical sanctity grounded in the divine coincidentia oppositorum, where apparent contradiction does not undermine truth but constitutes its very core.

Donne remains an enigmatic figure, one shaped by tensions and dualities. His poetry and biography, like Cubist canvases, demand interpretation from multiple angles. Yet, from this fragmentation, emerges a coherent whole. The convergence of life and art, spiritual longing and intellectual inquiry, sacred duty and human passion, defines his singular contribution. Through intellectual courage and poetic imagination, Donne renders complexity not only intelligible, but profound: a sacred paradox in its own right.

BIBLIOGRAPHY / BIBLIOGRAFIA

Bald, Robert C. *John Donne: A Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Bloom, Harold. "Introduction." In *John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets*. Edited by Harold Bloom and Michael G. Cornelius. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008.

Bloom, Harold, and Michael G. Cornelius. *John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets.* New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008.

Browne, Thomas. "Religio Medici." In *The Prose of Sir Thomas Browne*. Edited by Norman J. Endicott. New York: Doubleday, 1967.

Burzyńska, Joanna. "An Unnoticed Aspect of the Argument: A New Interpretation of '*The Canonization*' by John Donne." *Linguistica et Anglica Gedaniensia* 1 (1978): 123–41.

---

[124] P a r f i t t, *John Donne: A Literary Life*, 57.

[125] Ibidem.

[126] John D o n n e, "Pseudo-Martyr," in John Donne, *Selected Prose*, eds. Helen Gardner and Timothy Healey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 44–55.

[127] Ibidem, 48.

[128] John D o n n e, "To the Countess of Bedford. On New Year's Day," lines 33 and 36–37, in *Poems of John Donne*, ed. Edmund K. Chambers, vol. 2 (London and New York: A. H. Bullen and Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), 27.

[129] D o n n e, "The Canonization," line 1, 57.

Cambridge Dictionary, s.v. "sanctity." https://dictionary.cambridge.org.
Carey, John. *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.
Copleston, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy*. Vol. 3. *Late Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy*. London: Continuum, 2003.
DiPasquale, Theresa M. *Literature and Sacrament: The Sacred and the Secular in John Donne*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1999.
Donne John. "The Canonization." In *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*. Edited by C. A. Patrides. London and Melbourne: Dent, 1988.
Donne, John. "Devine Meditations." In *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*. Vol. 7. Part 1. *The Holy Sonnets*. Edited by Gary A. Stringer et al. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005.
Donne, John. "The Extasie." In *The Complete English Poems of John Donne.* Edited by C. A. Patrides. London and Melbourne: Dent, 1988.
Donne, John. "The Flea." In *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*. Edited by C. A. Patrides. London and Melbourne: Dent, 1988.
Donne, John. "The good-morrow." In *The Complete English Poems of John Donne.* Edited by C. A.. Patrides. London and Melbourne: Dent, 1988.
Donne, John. "Holy Sonnets." In *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*. Vol. 7. Part 1. *The Holy Sonnets*. Edited by Gary A. Stringer et al. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005.
Donne, John. "*Hymne to God my God, in my sicknesse."* In *The Complete English Poems of John Donne.* Edited by C. A. Patrides. London and Melbourne: Dent, 1988.
Donne, John. "A Hymne to God the Father." In *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*. Edited by C. A. Patrides. London and Melbourne: Dent, 1988.
Donne, John. "Pseudo-Martyr," in John Donne, *Selected Prose, eds. Helen Gardner and Timothy Healey. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.*
Donne, John. *The Sermons of John Donne*. Edited by George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson. Vol. 7. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959.
Donne, John. "*To the Countess of Bedford. On New Year's Day."* In *Poems of John Donne*. Edited by Edmund K. Chambers. Vol. 2. London and New York: A. H. Bullen and Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901.
Donne, John. "The undertaking." In *The Complete English Poems of John Donne.* Edited by C. A. Patrides. London and Melbourne: Dent, 1988.
Gardner, Helen. "Introduction." *The Metaphysical Poets. Ed*ited by Helen Gardner. N.p.: Penguin 1982.
Gosse, Edmund. *The Life and Letters of John Donne*. Vols. 1 and 2. London: W. Heinemann, 1899.
Grierson, Herbert J. C. "Introduction." In *The Poems of John Donne*. Edited by Herbert J. C. Grierson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945.

Grierson, Herbert J. C. "Metaphysical Poetry." In *Seventeenth-Century English Poetry: Modern Essays in Criticism*. Edited by William R. Keast. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962.

Herbert, George. *The Temple*. Edited by Edgar C. S. Gibson. London: Methuen & Co., 1899.

"John Donne (1572–1631)." In *John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets*. Edited by Harold Bloom and Michael G. Cornelius. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008.

Johnson, Samuel. *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets, with Critical Observations on Their Works*. vols. 1–3. London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1854.

Kowalik, Barbara. *Betwixt "engelaunde" and "englene londe": Dialogic Poetics in Early English Religious Lyric*. New York: Peter Lang, 2010.

McGrath, Patrick. *Papists and Puritans under Elizabeth I*. London: Blandford Press, 1967.

Miller, John. *Popery and Politics in England 1660–1688*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973.

[Nicholas of Cusa]. *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance: A Translation and an Appraisal of "De Docta Ignorantia*." Edited and translated by Jasper Hopkins. Minneapolis: A.J. Benning Press, 1985.

The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles, s.v. "sacred." Edited by Lesley Brown. Vol. 2. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles, s.v. "saint." Edited by Lesley Brown. Vol. 2. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

Parfitt, George. *John Donne: A Literary Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989.

Pismo Święte Starego i Nowego Testamentu. Edited by Tomasz Bielski and Wacław Markowski. Poznań and Warszawa: Pallottinum, 1971.

Poulet, Georges. *The Metamorphoses of the Circle*. Translated by Carley Dawson and Elliott Coleman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966.

Shami, Jeanne. *John Donne and Conformity in Crisis in the Late Jacobean Pulpit*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003.

Sloane, Thomas O. "Dr Donne and the Image of Christ." *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 24, no. 2 (2006): 187–216.

Targoff, Ramie. *John Donne, Body and Soul*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Traherne, Thomas. *Centuries of Meditations*. Edited by Bertram Dobell. London: The Editor, 1908.

Walker, Julia M. "Donne's Words Taught in Numbers." *Studies in Philology* 84, no. 1 (1987): 44–60.

Walton, Isaac. "*The Life of John Donne*." In *The Lives*. Edited by George Routledge. London: Routledge, 1888.

ABSTRACT / ABSTRAKT

Dorota GŁADKOWSKA, Coincidentia Oppositorum Realized: John Donne's Life and Poetry, and the Paradox of Sanctity

DOI 10.12887/38-2025-4-152-14

This essay examines John Donne's life and poetry as a unified expression of a spiritual and intellectual paradox. Drawing on the concept of coincidentia oppositorum, it explores how Donne's work integrates sacred and secular realms, eroticism and devotion, personal conviction and social expectation. Rather than portraying sanctity as uniform piety, Donne advances a complex vision of Christian spirituality shaped by contradiction. His poetic and biographical trajectory—from his Catholic heritage to his ordination in the Church of England—reveals a courageous engagement with ambiguity as a path to insight. Donne's intellectual and spiritual stance resists fixed binaries, suggesting that truth may be disclosed not through resolution, but through the tension that unites opposing forces.

Keywords: John Donne, coincidentia oppositorum, the paradox of sanctity, metaphysical poetry, the sacred and the secular, intellectual courage

Contact: Department of English Language Literatures and Cultures, Institute of Literary Studies, Faculty of the Humanities, University of Warmia and Mazury, ul. Kurta Obitza 1, room 209, 10-725 Olsztyn, Poland
E-mail: dorota.gladkowska@uwm.edu.pl
Phone: +48 698685545
https://uwm.edu.pl/anglistyka/artykul/455/dr-dorota-gladkowska.html
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5223-7662

Dorota GŁADKOWSKA, Coincidentia Oppositorum urzeczywistniona: życie i poezja Johna Donne'a a paradoks świętości

DOI 10.12887/38-2025-4-152-14

Artykuł analizuje życie i poezję Johna Donne'a jako zintegrowane wyrażenie paradoksu intelektualnego i duchowego. Odwołując się do koncepcji coincidentia oppositorum, autorka bada, jak twórczość Donne'a łączy sfery sacrum i profanum, erotyzm i duchowość, przekonania osobiste i oczekiwania społeczne. Zamiast ukazywać świętość jako jednolitą pobożność, Donne proponuje złożoną, ukształtowaną przez sprzeczności wizję duchowości chrześcijańskiej. Jego poetycka i biograficzna droga – od katolickiego dziedzictwa do ordynacji anglikańskiej – ukazuje odważne podejście do niejednoznaczności jako drogi do poznania. Postawa Donne'a przeciwstawia się uproszczonym podziałom, sugerując, że prawda może objawiać się nie przez rozstrzygnięcie, lecz przez napięcie jednoczące przeciwieństwa.

Słowa kluczowe: John Donne, coincidentia oppositorum, paradoks świętości, poezja metafizyczna, świętość i świeckość, odwaga intelektualna

Kontakt: Katedra Literatur i Kultur Anglojęzycznych, Instytut Literaturoznawstwa, Wydział Humanistyczny, Uniwersytet Warmińsko-Mazurski w Olsztynie, ul. Kurta Obitza 1, pokój 209, 10-725 Olsztyn
E-mail: dorota.gladkowska@uwm.edu.pl
Tel. 698685545
https://uwm.edu.pl/anglistyka/artykul/455/dr-dorota-gladkowska.html
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5223-7662