Dorota Głodkowska
(University of Warmia and Mazury Olsztyn)

The Metaphysical Lyric in the Light of Transgeneric Narratology

Abstract:

This article analyses two sixteenth-century lyrics (referred to as metaphysical) from the collection of John Donne's *Songs and Sonnets* – "The triple Foole" and "The Apparition" – by means of methods proposed by transgeneric narratology. The author highlights those aspects of Donne's poems which reveal the features of the narrative text as well as those of the dramatic text, thus pointing to their multigeneric and multifaceted character. The method adopted results in the recognition of chains of happenings triggered by the text in specific manners as well as levels of text-internal communication and distinct perspectives, with the role of the reader in the management of these carefully observed.

Keywords: John Donne, transgeneric analysis, lyric, levels of communication, perspective, text reception

The aim of this article is to analyse selected lyrics (*Songs and Sonnets*) of John Donne (1572–1631) – referred to as the initiator of the school of metaphysical poetry – by means of methods proposed by transgeneric narratology, an approach based on two assumptions: that narration is understood as "a communicative act in which a chain of happenings is meaningfully structured and transmitted in a particular medium and from a particular point of view" and that narratological categories "can be applied to the analysis of both [lyric] poems and plays"[1]. Donne's poetry provides ample and valuable material for such analysis – its multigeneric character and various, often contradictory, perspectives have been a real challenge for scholars attempting to classify his works and readers seeking a coherent vision in his poetic output. The adopted approach seems to offer new possibilities, especially that, as Peter Hühn and Jörg Schönert point out, it "allow[s] for a more precise analysis of lyric poems in their individual, historical and cultural variations than do traditional methods", a point strongly advocated also by Eva Müller-Zettelmann, who argues that "a systematic transfer of the results

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[1] Peter Hühn and Roy Sommer, "Narration in Poetry and Drama", http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de [accessed 25 May 2018].

of narratology" will "raise the theoretical level both of reflection on poetry and of poetry criticism"[2].

It should be noted, first of all, that the word "metaphysical" was linked to Donne's poems as late as in the eighteenth century[3]. In Donne's time this type of verse was named "strong-lined" – an undoubtedly accurate term, which, nevertheless, functioned as an unflattering reference to the excessive compression of senses, the network of far-reaching analogies, and "a certain deliberate roughness in versification" violating the classical rules of poetic creation (frequent irregularities of rhyme and meter)[4]. It should also be emphasised that the sixteenth-century metaphysical poem is to be viewed not only as attempting to "depict the universal nature of all existing things"[5], but also as a specific fusion of features currently separated as belonging either to the sphere of humanities or that of sciences. It may be considered unique that the poet is willing to employ, among other fields, social, medical, legal, astronomical and alchemical contexts, organises his leitmotifs by means of numbers, employs elements of poetic riddle in the lyrical form of poetry, and at the same time structures his poems (single ones as well as whole cycles) to achieve a proportional or graphic (meaningful – hieroglyphic) effect[6]. Despite the apparent simplicity in the selection of lexical items, Donne's poems have been labelled as difficult, as verse for the chosen, largely due to the specific nature of his metaphysical conceit, based on ambiguity and the epigrammatic statement, as well as on numerous paradoxes and contradictions. Indeed, we are entering a puzzling poetic world which proves rewarding to the reader who adopts an analytical approach while tracing the (inter)textual cross-references. Since Donne's poetry is famous for having broken conventional barriers or, to put it differently, for highlighting bonds between seemingly disparate or conflicting phenomena (not without reason is Donne's concept defined as *concordia discors*[7]), the transgeneric approach appears fine-tuned to the needs of its comprehensive analysis.

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[2] Ibid. – based on Peter Hühn and Jörg Schönert, "Zur narratologischen analyse von lyrik", *Poetica 2002*, no. 34, 295–298; Eva Müller-Zettelmann, "Lyrik und narratologie", in: *Erzähltheorie transgenerisch, intermedial, interdisziplinär*, ed. A. Nünning and V. Nünning, Trier: WVT 2002, pp. 130-31, 139–48.

[3] It was introduced into literary criticism by Samuel Johnson in the essay "The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets" (1779–81) – see Helen Gardner, "Introduction", in: *The Metaphysical Poets*, ed. idem, Aylesbury: Hazel Watson & Viney 1982, pp. 15–29.

[4] Ibid., p. 15, 17; see also pp. 15–29.

[5] "uchwycić uniwersalną naturę wszystkich istniejących rzeczy". Janusz Jusiak, "Myślenie metafizyczne i niemetafizyczne", *Przegląd Filozoficzny – Nowa Seria* 1994, y. III, no. 2, p. 43 [transl. mine].

[6] See Dorota Gładkowska, "*Sonety święte* Johna Donne'a – oblicza Boga zakodowane w układach tekstu", in: *Postać w kulturze wizualnej*, vol. 1: *Ujęcia literackie*, ed. A. Krawczyk-Łaskarzewska, D. Bruszewska-Przytuła, P. Przytuła, Olsztyn: Wyd. UWM, pp. 63–81 [forthcoming 2018]. This may be viewed as Donne's contribution to the 16th-century debate over the role of the poet-architect. About the fascination of renaissance poets with architecture – see David Cowling, *Building the Text. Architecture as Metaphor in Late Medieval and Early Modern France*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1998.

[7] As Don Parry Norford observes, the 16th-century metaphysical concept consists in "[h]olding the two elements of the metaphor at once apart and together, conceding likeness while being strongly conscious of unlikeness [...] – [...] a *concordia discors* or *coincidentia oppositorum* [...] or perhaps, following Earl Miner, we should describe [it] as a *discordia concors*, emphasizing, as did [Samuel] Johnson, the violence involved in yoking heterogeneous ideas together" – Don Parry Norford, "Microcosm and Macrocosm in Seventeenth-century Literature", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1977, vol. 38, no. 3, p. 427; see also Earl Miner, *The Metaphysical Mode from Donne to Cowley*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1969, p. 205.

Accordingly, this article focuses on those aspects of Donne's lyrics which reveal the characteristics of the narrative text, understood in the manner specified above, as well as those of the dramatic text, for the boundary between these three literary modes is frequently blurred in the area subjected to examination. Following the research path proposed by Hühn and Sommer, I will therefore consider "the levels of the happenings and of their mediation in the form of the poetic text", "the organization of its sequential structure" and "the act and process of articulation"[8]. More specifically, the method adopted will result in the recognition of sequences of events as well as aspects of text-internal communication and distinct perspectives entwined in the compositional structure of two lyrics from the collection of *Songs and Sonnets* – "The triple Foole" and "The Apparition"[9]. Special emphasis will be put on the narratological dimensions which become visible only in the course of detailed structural and thematic analysis, with the role of the reader in the management of these carefully observed.

The conventionally recognised subjective immediacy of lyric poetry, which seems devoid of a mediating voice, is referred to by Müller-Zettelmann as "aesthetic illusion" created by means of various techniques, the effectiveness of which is limited by the extent of the reader's perception. This phenomenon, as she claims, is highlighted "in poems where the speaker presents himself as a creative poet"[10] – a statement which points towards "The triple Foole", where the lyrical "I" is cast in the role of a Petrarchan poet in the very introductory lines, which also specify his motives and the source of his creative inspiration. It is also here that we start recognising the story structure and elements attributed to particular stages of the plot:

I am two fooles, I know,
For loving, and for saying so
In whining Poetry;
But where's that wiseman, that would not be I,
If she would not deny?
Then as th'earths inward narrow crooked lanes
Do purge sea waters fretfull salt away,
I thought, if I could draw my paines,
Through Rimes vexation, I should them allay,
Griefe brought to numbers cannot be so fierce,
For, he tames it, that fetters it in verse. (ll.1–11)

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[8] Hühn and Sommer, "Narration ...", op. cit.

[9] In the whole article the spelling of the titles of Donne's lyrics as well as all the fragments quoted, follow *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, ed. C. A. Patrides, London: J. M. Dent & Sons 1988, pp. 59–60, 94–95, 113–114 (based on the first and second editions of *Poems* [1633, 1635]).

[10] The phenomenon of subjective immediacy understood as "direct unfiltered communication of experience by [the] author identified with [the] speaker" – ibidem; see Müller-Zettelmann, *Lyrik...*, op. cit., pp. 142–144.

In this skilfully crafted exposition the spotlight moves from the rejected, as it seems, lover towards the background figure of a woman – "she" (l. 5), whose behaviour is vaguely outlined in the interrogative couplet:

> But where's that wiseman, that would not be I,
> If she would not deny?

Indeed, the lady's attitude appears unfavourable[11] – an impression strengthened by the question with double negation and the negatively charged word: "deny". On closer analysis, though, what gives rise to doubts, and thus alternative scenarios, is the reason for encoding the message in the confusing syntax of the conditional question, twice negated (or even three times if we take into account the negative connotations of "deny") and further complicated by the repetition of the modal verb and the very ambiguity of the final "deny"[12]. Struggling with the sense of the speaker's puzzling enquiry, the reader is encouraged first to isolate the problematic comment and then to scrutinise and juxtapose its particular parts, pushing aside the rest of the poem. In this interpretative pause, Donne's epigrammatic mini-riddle itself reveals cause-and effect relations – alternative, even contradictory, scenarios on the level of associations and suggestions[13], which wait to be linked to the love story-line initiated at the outset of the poem. Playing with the couplet (as if with the Rubik's Cube), the reader tries to decide whether each movement displays a subjective flashback or a flashforward (retrospection or anticipation, external or internal)[14], at the same time juggling with the notions of wisdom and stupidity – time and attribution equally doubtful. In this manner, the reader has been entangled in a specific mental exercise, preparing them for the turning points and distinct perspectives in the following stanza:

> But when I have done so,
> Some man, his art and voice to show,
> Doth Set and sing my paine,
> And, by delighting many, frees againe
> Griefe, which verse did restraine.
> To Love, and Griefe tribute of Verse belongs,
> But not of such as pleases when'tis read,
> Bothe are increased by such songs:

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[11] A clear reference to the Petrarchan convention.

[12] "[D]eny" refers to: 1) "contradiction of a statement; negation" M16-E17"; 2) "refusal of what is asked, offered, etc. LME-E17" – *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, vol. 1, ed. L. Brown, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993, 635.

[13] About the reader's interpretation of textual signals in lyric poetry in terms of their "functions" – consequences for the recognition of the cause-and-effect sequences – see Emma Kafalenos, *Narrative Causalities*, Columbus: Ohio State UP 2006, 157–160; compare James S. Baumlin, *John Donne and the Rhetorics of Renaissance Discourse*, Columbia, London: University of Missouri Press 1991, p. 8, 306; Rosemund Tuve, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1947, pp. 174–175.

[14] See the definitions in Manfred Jahn, *Narratology: A Guide to the Theory of Narrative*, http://www.unikoeln. de /~ame02/pppn. htm#N5 [accessed 31 July 2018].

For both their triumphs so are published,

And I, which was two fooles, do so grow three;

Who are a little wise, the best fooles bee. (ll. 12–22)

The resolution comes in the form of another riddle – numerical – echoing the leading motif of the lover-poet's stupidity and thus embracing the whole poem within a narrative frame (ll. 1–3, 21–22). "The triple Foole" is now viewed in an anti-Petrarchan light and/which assumes a cyclical structure. Only seemingly simple to solve, Donne's poetic riddle is based on the gradation of the dichotomy: stupidity/wiseness, with the boundary between them flexible or even completely blurred. What is more, it is incorporated in the polarity between the speaker's declarations (the rhetoric) and the reality presented (the actual deeds), which also echoes throughout the whole argument and characterises the speaker implicitly as unreliable, despite his apparently omnipresent nature.

What should be recognised, apart from the dispute about the conventional perception of love and that of poetry, thereby initiated, is the fact that, as a whole, "The triple Foole" depicts the discrepancy between the lover-poet's intention (the effect planned by the author) and the individual reading of his literary work[15], demonstrating Donne's high awareness of the implications involved in text creation and reception. Here, we should observe the structure of the lyric analysed. The division into two stanzas of equal length (11+11 lines, 93+93 syllables) brings about a remarkable effect of proportional distribution of key aspects and arguments. In the first stanza Donne draws on the conventional "conceit of the unwanted heart," unrequited love which results in grief and pain, whereas in the latter he transfers "the confined and meditative world of Petrarch" into the area of remedial action and logical arguments[16]. Hence, opposite viewpoints are given equal attention. Concurrently, the speaker's creative space in the first stanza and the domain of interpretation and modification, assigned to the addressees in the other, are juxtaposed and counterbalanced as if on scales. As justly observed by Scott W. Wilson, "[the] recognition in "The triple Foole" of the interpretative play of the reader suggest[s] that Donne had an instinctive understanding of the reading process which Wolfgang Iser has more recently described in phenomenological terms"[17]. The message of this sixteenth-century lyric poem is coherent with Iser's twentieth-century observations that:

[the] literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the aesthetic: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the aesthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader. From this polarity it follows that the literary work cannot be completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but in fact must lie halfway between the two[18].

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[15] Also noticed by Scott W. Wilson ("Process and Product: Reconstructing Donne's Personae", *Studies in English Literature* 1980, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 91–103).

[16] From the analysis of Donne's "The Blossome" – Silvia Ruffo-Fiore, "The Unwanted Heart in Petrarch and Donne", *Comparative Literature* 1972, vol. 24, no. 4, p. 327.

[17] Wilson, "Process ...", p. 92, 93.

[18] Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach", in: *New Directions in Literary History*, ed. R. Cohen, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1974, p. 125.

Apart from that, "The triple Foole" seems to recognise the individuality of reception – it is the level of the audience ("many" l. 15) where the notions of "Love" and "Griefe," considered integral by the speaker, are mentioned as separate and thus juxtaposed; where love is associated not only with grief but also with pleasure and plural "triumphs" (ll. 17–20). This poetic message may be paraphrased by referring to Hühn and Sommer, who conclude, while discussing the application of narratological tools in lyric poetry (namely the analysis of communication levels), that "the operation of attribution [is] performed by [each] reader in accordance with his particular understanding of the text"[19]. In this respect, however, the speaker's amazement and his rejection of facts, as they are, once again reveal his limited viewpoint on the nature of both love and poetry. The presence of this broader perspective indicates that the act of communication has reached a higher level and is performed by a more knowledgeable authority addressing the implied recipient.

On the lower stages of its hierarchy, Donne's lyric also exemplifies distinct levels of communication and instances of their overlapping[20]. These are visible in the interaction along the line: 1) the omnipresent speaker ("I"), the creator of a text-internal poem, who distances himself from the world presented and is convinced of the righteousness of his approach to love and the traditionally defined function of lyric poetry; 2) the individual interpreter (singer: "some man"), who 'filters' the content of the speaker's poem through his own mind and freely decides about its shape; 3) the multiplied recipients ("many" l. 15), who further contribute to the unexpected effect. In that, indeed, "The triple Foole" has a clear interpretive story-line, which mixes thematic areas into speaker/hearer roles, and in which we should highlight two levels of mediation with the turn of perspective (focalisation/voice)[21] as well as the relation: singer – audience. The latter may be considered in terms of interaction between characters, on the one hand, and between the mediating agent and his narratees on the other[22]. The very fact that "The triple Foole" casts the speaker as the creator of another lyric (a poem in a poem) may be viewed as an illustration of "the manipulated

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[19] Hühn and Sommer, "Narration ...", op. cit.

[20] The analyses presented in this article refer to the distinctions proposed by: ibidem; Menno Kraan, "Towards a Model of Lyric Communication: Some Historical and Theoretical Remarks", Russian Literature 1991, nr 30, pp. 222–23; Klaus Dieter Seemann, *Die Kommunikationsstruktur im lyrischen Gedicht, in: Text, Symbol, Weltmodell: Johannes Holthusen zum 60*. Geburtstag, ed. W. Schmid, R. Döring-Smirnov, München: Sager 1984, p. 535–38; Peter Hühn, "Transgeneric Narratology: Applications to Lyric Poetry", in: *The Dynamics of Narrative Form*, ed. J. Pier, Berlin: de Gruyter 2004, 147–51. "The triple Foole" presents the communication levels of the literary work which are basically the same as those named therein. Kraan notices the inseparability of communication levels in the lyrics of Romanticism and clear distinctions in those of Modernism. We are reaching deeper into the past – the key notions are exemplified by the personae of "The triple Foole"; their relations (overlapping and separation) are directly described (they play their particular roles), yet with the use of sixteenth-century terminology.

[21] As explained by Hühn and Sommer, voice – "a narrator's or a character's verbal utterance, their language;" focalization – "the position that determines perception and cognition, the deictic centre of the perceptual, cognitive, psychological and ideological focus on the happenings" – Hühn and Sommer, "Narration ...", op. cit.; see also Hühn, "Transgeneric...", op. cit., pp. 147–51.

[22] Considering "The triple Foole", Wilson goes one step further and concludes that the reader is thereby symbolically introduced to the world of love created by Donne (*Process ...*, op. cit., p. 92).

collapse of the agents/instances and levels of protagonist, speaker and author as well as the contrived congruence of voice and focalization"[23].

A further observation was made by Scott W. Wilson, who points to the three personae: the suffering lover-poet, the singer who releases love, and the author-commentator. Wilson concludes that:

Just as the 'foole' is a triple one, there may be said to be three poets and poems functioning in "The triple Foole": the persona's interior poem, the singer's interpretation of that poem, and the exterior poem written by Donne (whose voice finally breaks out in the sententious ending: 'Who are a little wise, the best fooles bee')[24].

What can undoubtedly be observed is a perceptible dissonance between the speaker's inner convictions and the implied author's mocking attitude to these. The manner in which "The triple Foole" illustrates "the notoriously tricky problem" of the "distinction between speaker and implied author, based on textual signals in the composition of the work"[25], is noteworthy.

Here, still another observation about overlapping perspectives in "The triple Foole" may be made. It concerns the lyric subject in the role of the creator of a poem and Donne – the author as the creator of the work analysed. The motives behind the speaker's attempt to translate his individual experience of love into convoluted lyric verse are explained adequately. He aims to restrain and systematise his feelings by translating them into numbers (ll. 10–11); he endows numbers with the power of organising the emotional sphere of the world presented (ll. 10, 11) – an act only seemingly strange, in fact deep-rooted in Donne's cultural background[26]. Given the fact that "The triple Foole" is a numerical riddle[27] grading the poet-lover's stupidity from double to triple: 2 – 3 (in fact: 1 – 3 if we take into account the number of reasons directly specified), the following line, "Griefe brought to numbers cannot be so fierce," may be understood as the implied author's sarcastic reference to the mental capacity of those for whom love means grief or those who describe love as associated with grief. Stupidity is thus linked to "the tribute" (l. 17) paid to the Petrarchan convention of love poetry. However, numbers are at the same time viewed as an integral part of poetry, which, in the light of the proportional distribution of the thematic areas of the poem, deserves more serious thought. This is yet another example of ambiguity (lexical and syntactic), which invariably proves functional in Donne's lyrics, as it induces the juxtaposition of various perspectives.

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[23] Hühn and Sommer, "Narration ...", op. cit.; compare: Hühn and Schönert, *Zur narratologischen...*, op. cit., pp. 295–298; Hühn, *Transgeneric...*, op. cit., pp. 147–151.

[24] Wilson, "Process ...", op. cit., p. 92.

[25] Hühn and Sommer, "Narration ...", op. cit.

[26] In Donne's days the perception of numbers went far beyond the frame of our modern understanding of their functionality. They were surrounded by an aura of mysticism, while numerology and alchemy still had the status of sciences.

[27] About various types of the poetic riddle – see Alison R. Rieke, "Donne's Riddles", *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 1984, vol. 83, no. 1, pp. 1–20.

Accordingly, "The triple Foole" – a riddle which operates with numbers: 1, 2, 3 – consists of 22 lines; the account of the speaker's attempt to "tame" unfavourable reality and "fetter" his "paines" and "Griefe" takes 11 lines; pain(s) are mentioned once in each stanza (x1), altogether twice (x2); grief is recalled once in the first stanza (x1) and twice in the second (x2), all in all 3 times (x3). Thereby, Donne's lyric seems to be organised according to the numerical principles that govern the presented world[28]. Furthermore, it may be concluded that, together with particular emotions, "The triple Foole" promotes a specific analytical approach to the act of poetic creation – shared by both the author and his speaker – the harmonious co-existence of seemingly distinct spheres.

Just as much as ambiguity, which flourishes in "The triple Foole" and stems from a single phrase, or a line, or an epigrammatic couplet, gradually reaching towards the whole poem, instances of overlapping and distinctiveness may be observed within the hierarchy of the poem's levels of communication. They, nevertheless, function within a common thematic and compositional frame and seem to work towards a diversified, yet coherent, message. This observation sheds new light on the whole cycle of Donne's *Songs and Sonnets*, accounting for the presence of its various (often contradictory) viewpoints. To avoid the hasty conclusion about its lack of coherence or the occasional character of particular poems, we should analyse the sequence intertextually and consider the clash of perspectives in the common area of debate. Here again, "the operation of attribution [will be] performed by [the] reader in accordance with his particular understanding of the text"[29], or, to put it differently, their potential to adopt an analytical approach. Viewed in this light, "The triple Foole" assumes the explanatory function of a specific poetic manual intentionally left for the implied reader to discover while finding their way through the paradoxes of Donne's cycle.

"The triple Foole" is undoubtedly composed in a manner which opens many areas for interpretation. It speaks about the emotional implications of unrequited love and, in this respect, may be viewed as lyrical. As a numerical riddle, which encompasses puzzling epigrammatic statements, it calls for the reader's analytical approach. It largely depends on the reader's ability to bind facts, recognise contradictions, identify levels of communication, and observe different perspectives by considering the details of its act of articulation. In this way it responds to the literary convention by initiating a dialectical debate on the perception of love and the function of poetry. At the same time, "The triple Foole" directly describes the features of the process of literary creation and interpretation, referring to the accompanying emotions. It is therefore a functional illustration of the model of the world communicated. This multifaceted and multi-faced poem constantly stimulates the reader's imagination. It draws a clear situational context with a set of characters (roles): the lover-poet, the woman, the singer, the audience, the commentator, and introduces a scenic conflict, thus revealing its pseudo-theatrical

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[28] More about the senses encoded in Donne's texts by means of numbers and numerical references – see Julia M. Walker, "Donne's Words Taught in Numbers", *Studies in Philology* 1987, vol. 84, nr. 1, pp. 44–60.

[29] Hühn and Sommer, "Narration ...", op. cit.

quality. In addition to all this, as Wilson accurately notices, "The triple Foole" may also be regarded as one of Donne's *seduction* poems – another display of the speaker's convoluted rhetoric aimed to seduce a woman, a statement which reorganises the setting completely. Now, on stage there are only two actors in a secluded and private space. Here, "the triumphs of grief and love" cease to refer to the speaker's actual state of mind and become a mere "rhetorical device"[30]. Then, "The triple Foole" itself undergoes a metamorphosis and reveals its features as a dramatic monologue (one of many in Donne's oeuvre). After all, the discrepancy between the speaker's perspective and that of the higher authority (the implied author), which defines the speaker as unreliable, is viewed as typical of this poetic sub-genre[31]. Despite its transgeneric and multi-dimensional nature, "The triple Foole" is still composed in a manner which ensures an artful fusion of all the above-mentioned aspects. The result achieved is a specific first impression – "the effect of unmediated subjectivity", "the seemingly unmediated self-expression of the poet in a simultaneously ongoing experience [...]"[32].

Since the analysis of both fiction and drama allows for the application of the research tools of narratology[33], let us now consider Donne's lyric "The Apparition", where features of theatrical performance are easily observable. Donne's particular interest in the theatre[34] resulted in a multitude of poems where particular stages of the plot, sequences of events, and relations between characters blend well with the lyrical aspect and constitute the foundation of the main concept. Donne's lyrics support the speaker's argument with a dramatic scene (visualisation, exemplum) which has a clear story-line. Just like prose fiction, they provide enough textual material for the analysis of "the two fundamental constituents of the narrative process, temporal sequentiality and mediation"[35].

The very outset of "The Apparition" defines this one-stanza poem as a dramatic monologue. What comes to the foreground is the voice of a frustrated, rejected lover, who addresses a lady and expresses his disapproval of her soullessness and infidelity. Then he promptly goes on to threaten the unresponsive woman by laying out the details of his revenge plan:

> When by thy scorne, O murdresse, I am dead,
> And that thou thinkst thee free
> From all solicitation from mee,

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[30] Wilson, "Process …", op. cit., p. 92.

[31] The dramatic monologue as such is commonly attributed to Victorian poets, who are said to have initiated and popularised this poetic genre – e.g. see Hühn and Sommer, "Narration …", op. cit.

[32] Ibidem. On the dominance of a particular literary mode in the text, depending on the reader's recognition of the prevailing type of utterance – see Andrzej Zgorzelski, "Systemowe nacechowanie tekstu literackiego", in: *System i funkcja. Ustalenia metodologiczne i propozycje teoretycznoliterackie*, ed. idem, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Gdańskie 1999, pp. 34–52.

[33] Brian Richardson, "Drama and Narrative", in: *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. D. Herman, Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2007, pp. 142–155.

[34] About Donne's fascination with the Elizabethan theatre see: Gardner, "Introduction", op. cit., p. 23; *The Complete English …*, op. cit., p. 22; Thomas O. Sloane, "Dr. Donne and the Image of Christ", *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 2006, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 187–216.

[35] Hühn and Sommer, "Narration …", op. cit.

Then shall my ghost come to thy bed,
And thee, fain'd vestal in worse armes shall see;
Then thy sicke taper will begin to winke,
And he, whose thou art then, being tyr'd before,
Will, if thou stirre, or pinch to wake him, thinke
Thou call'st for more,
And in false sleepe will from thee shrinke,
And then poore Aspen wretch, neglected thou
Bath'd in a cold quicksilver sweat wilt lye,
A veryer ghost than I,
What I will say, I will not tell thee now,
Lest that preserve thee'; and since my love is spent,
I'had rather thou shouldst painfully repent,
Then by my threatenings rest still innocent.

The speaker's prospective narration is leading to a decisive turn, which is finally discarded. The recognition of the pseudo-theatrical character of the poem comes together with the chain of events arranged out of chronological order[36]. Quite surprisingly, the bulk of the lyric is occupied by an introductory episode which has the features of Genettean prolepsis. We watch a horror-like bedroom scene which encompasses a sequence of images and involves the technique of close-up: the lover ("dead") – the lady (indifferent, "free") – the lover-"ghost" enters the bedroom – approaches the "bed" – another man ("worse arms") – "taper" ("wink[ing]") – "he" (tired, sleeps) – she (scared, "stirr[ing]" and "pinch[ing]" him) – he (indifferent, bored: "think[s] [she] call[s] for more", "shrink[s]", pretends to "sleepe") – she (trembling, "wretch[ed]", "neglected", "sweat[ing]", sick) – the lover-"ghost" – opens his mouth, will talk – the curtain is dropped.

Then, towards the end of the poem, there comes the illumination that the whole episode is inbuilt in the frame of another bedroom scene, set at the present moment and vaguely sketched in the line: "What I will say, I will not tell thee now". Yet it is not to be called a major turning point of the main story; it is here that the action proper begins.

Having recognised the flashforward, with the classical unity of place apparently preserved, we start viewing the speaker's first-person account of events as the projection of a hypothetical situation – a statement supported by the final couplet, which in fact confirms the lady's present innocence: "Then by my threatenings rest still innocent". Hence, the in-built episode proves flexible enough to be regarded as an exemplum illustrating the moral point – the consequences of love based on false assumptions and wrong

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[36] Compare the observations made by Peter Hühn on the differences between novels/stories and lyrics: the preference for simultaneous narration, the frequent lack of resolution after prolonged anticipation, as well as the negotiating function of the instances where prospective narration is employed – Peter Hühn, "Plotting the Lyric: Forms of Narration in Poetry", in: *Theory into Poetry*, ed. E. Müller-Zettelmann and M. Rubik, Amsterdam: Rodopi 2005, p. 167.

choices. This gentle perspective of a concerned lover (unlike the Petrarchan viewpoint expressed previously) immediately overlaps with the reflection that, after the temporal shift backwards, only two characters remain on stage, in their seemingly mini-farce roles of the seducer and the lady being seduced (a sarcastically anti-Petrarchan scene). Alternatively, the whole argument of the poem may lose its persuasive dimension and be viewed as a display of mere wit – given the high degree of intimacy (the bedroom setting, the language used), it is possible we have two lovers killing time by becoming engaged in their own performances, simultaneously (on-the-scene) reported by the man. As can be seen, the transgeneric approach to "The Apparition" results in the recognition of various scenarios, which inevitably involve smooth shifts in the points of focalisation (connected with particular roles played – voices).

These shifts depend, to a large degree, on the reader's ability to recognise Donne's riddles, which leave room for doubt, just like the one behind the speaker's motives to "now" hide the words uttered by his ghost in the future to ensure the future painful repentance felt by the lady, who is now unresponsive:

> I'had rather thou shouldst painfully repent,
> Then by my threatenings rest still innocent.

The attempt to successfully unweave the temporal and spatial references and then link the lyrical subject's plans as well as his intentions as a seducer with the motif of innocence/promiscuity ("fain'd vestal") remains a real brain-training exercise. Yet it seems the reader is not supposed to negate any of the considered perspectives, but recognise their harmonious coexistence – a specific 'chord' of conflicting emotions. What seems essential for a fruitful analysis, though, is the recognition of the poem's transgeneric nature and, hence, its sequentiality and aspects of spatial and temporal organisation. And even then Donne's lyric will leave room for doubt and thus stimulate the reader to search for inconsistencies and discover its new dimensions.

This type of interaction between the implied author and the implied reader, engaging the latter in a perspective game, justifies the separation of any single viewpoint presented in "The Apparition" or "The triple Foole" from the author and thus allows for distinguishing particular levels of mediation. Neither of these lyrics can be treated as an act of "direct unfiltered communication of experience by [the] author identified with [the] speaker as the subject of this experience"[37]. Donne's poems reveal the presence of the mediating agent and manipulate his perspective by making him appear in various roles encoded in textual details. Therefore, the initial impression of subjective immediacy, as defined above, may be referred to as "aesthetic illusion" – "the intended effect of various techniques"[38]. However, the analyses of *Songs and Sonnets* teach that quick attempts to categorise phenomena prove superficial, whereas careful observation leads to the recognition of alternative opinions. Likewise, the conclusion that "Donne […]

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[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.; Müller-Zettelmann, *Lyrik* ..., op. cit., pp. 142–144.

sought to engage his readers/audience in a shared perspective of experience"[39] should not be hastily rejected. It seems the subjectivity of Donne's poetry lies in translating the manner in which he viewed the implications of sixteenth-century social and literary trends into the ambiguities and complexities of his multi-voiced verse. In Donne's metaphysical lyric, what is more important than receiving clear-cut answers is the effort put into linking all the thematic threads. It is not the product but the process that results in valuable experience[40].

Given its multi-generic character, Donne's cycle of Songs and Sonnets is worth regarding as an area where the problematic issue of the applicability of "[the] concepts of narrative mediation" to refer to lyrics and drama, "currently under debate", may be analytically examined. Its effect of "all-embracing emotionality [and] self-contained artificiality", "preclud[ing] rational analysis", proves illusory. The sixteenth-century metaphysical poet reconciles reason and emotions, description and visualisation; supports the rhetoric with the depiction of deeds; perceives effective communication as one which activates the brains as much as the senses. He intuitively makes use of the techniques which were named and categorised as belonging to distinct literary modes a few centuries after his death. Without doubt, Donne's works undermine the statement that "(lyric) poems do not seem to tell stories". The analyses conducted above show that chains of happenings are presented therein either in the form of the speaker's direct account or encoded in specific textual relations and revealed through suggestion and association, thus activating "mental actions". In other words, "the performative aspects of storytelling", on the one hand, and "the cognitive activities involved in narrative comprehension", on the other, have been observed[41]. Nonetheless, within the limits of this article we could only touch on those aspects of Donne's poetry which deserve more thorough treatment with the research tools applied in narratology and thus outline an area still waiting to be systematically explored.

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[39] From the analyses of "Loves Alchymie", "Lovers infinitenesse" and "The Curse" – see Wilson, "Process ...", op. cit., pp. 93–95.

[40] Also observed by ibid., p. 95, 96, and Arnold Stein, *John Donne's Lyrics: The Eloquence of Action*, Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press 1962, p. 158.

[41] All the fragments quoted in the paragraph above from Hühn and Sommer, "Narration ...", op. cit.

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