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A MIND DRAWN BY A WORD
A meditative dimension of selected epigrams
by Richard Crashaw (1612–1649)

Unquestionably writing poetry belongs to substantial human activity in which one could express themselves. Searching for proper words and high-minded labour on connecting them in lines, stanzas and many other forms of poetical language create a chance to voice some inner experience. A good poet, conscious of his task, fulfills the need of *songs* that would form relationships with reality under, around, in and above him helping to step on the way of great values. If he is also a genuine Christian his work naturally contact with a power of faith, hope and love which are gifts of God's grace establishing a spiritual life so that a world of the most important values is equal to widely seen vocation. Here both humanistic and religious orders are united in life-giving deep inside synthesis which now on the whole aspires to be uttered¹.

However a religious (or metaphysical) artist could do even more because he makes some forms that are able to stop someone's mind in order to concentrate on well-prepared image. So drawn thought in the process of rereading finds a figurative sense of words read before which opens a new perspective of life and comprehending the world. Just here poetical talent and work serve as a factor connecting theological truths with one's attention. Especially this role is played by a conceit representing the poetics of Renaissance and Baroque as well the metaphysical poetry of the XVII c. Brevity and striking metaphorical character of this genre can be

¹ Although the relation between literature and religion may be an object of interesting consideration made e.g. by Helen Gardner, (cf. H. Gardner, *Religious Poetry: a Definition*, [in:] idem, *Religion and Literature*, London 1971, p. 121–142), including a conception of a religious poet committed to divine revelation; here it is taken for granted that poems by R. Crashaw represent just this case.

considered as a crucial moment of meditation when an act of reading ought to be stopped in order to take some *spiritual food* from there and next to contemplate the Reality with special assembling.

The epigrams of Richard Crashaw (1612–1649), an English great metaphysical poet, the eminent successor of George Herbert, make an object of fruitful research. In the following article a number of them are analysed as units of poetical genius linked to mental prayer even if not by a clear author's declaration so through their functional relevance.

A CONCEIT AGAINST A SPECIAL MOMENT OF MEDITATION

Thinking of an epigram as a literary genre a cardinal mark of it should be stressed. This is brevity allowing to recognize immediately when one has an outside look. Is there any common place between a short epigram and meditation which ought to last about one hour, as St. Ignatius Loyola wants? The answer does not mean any temporal identity nor even similarity but is hidden in some special propriety both of praying and reading. In the process of reading a person could stop getting new words in order to consider few of them have just been read. It makes reading more interesting and it leads to better understanding and knowledge of hidden meanings. Similarly, in the case of meditation a man is being drawn to concentrate on words, an image, a motive for it can open his mind to receive more and more on the way of reason and will. The founder of Jesuits writes of this very important activity:

For, if the person who is making the Contemplation, takes the true groundwork of the narrative, and, discussing and considering for himself, finds something which makes the events a little clearer or brings them a little more home to him – whether this comes through his own reasoning, or because his intellect is enlightened by the Divine power – he will get more spiritual relish and fruit, than if he who is giving the Exercises had much explained and amplified the meaning of the events. For it is not knowing much, but realising and relishing things interiorly, that contents and satisfies the soul².

Spiritual satisfaction, a privileged sign of meditation, directs steps of a man: [...] in the Point in which I find what I want, there I will rest, without being anxious to pass on, until I content myself³.

² Cf. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, translated from the autograph by E. Mullan S. J., New York 1914, [on:] <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/ignatius/exercises.titlepage.html> (06.06.2011), *Second Annotation* [2]. The notation used in additionally accompanied by a number of a proper point (in brackets) according to the generally accepted division of *The Spirituals Exercises*.

³ *The Spiritual Exercises...., Fourth Addition* [76].

This experience gets its semantic field like “spiritual relish and fruit”, “realising and relishing things” with the very characteristic verbs: “to content”, “to satisfy”, “to rest”. The description of this way according to *Our Father* brings more technical details both outer and inner:

The Second Method of Prayer is that the person, kneeling or seated, according to the greater disposition in which he finds himself and as more devotion accompanies him, keeping the eyes closed or fixed on one place, without going wandering with them, says Father, and is on the consideration of this word as long as he finds meanings, comparisons, relish and consolation in considerations pertaining to such word⁴.

The fruit (“relish”, “consolation”) are received by some intellectual operations like looking for meanings or comparisons. They all are able to lead to such a strong concentration that length of time becomes relatively dispensed:

The Second Rule is that, should the person who is contemplating the Our Father find in one word, or in two, matter so good to think over, and relish and consolation, let him not care to pass on, although the hour ends on what he finds [...]⁵.

In well known *Filotea* by St. Francis of Sales there is also an appeal to take an advantage of words while quality is more important than quantity. It is expressed in the famous allegory of a soul as a bee:

So, when you have, as I said, limited the efforts of your mind within due bounds, – whether by the imagination, if the subject be material, or by propositions, if it be a spiritual subject, – you will begin to form reflections or considerations after the pattern of the meditations I have already sketched for you. And if your mind finds sufficient matter, light and fruit wherein to rest in any one consideration, dwell upon it, even as the bee, which hovers over one flower so long as it affords honey. But if you do not find wherewith to feed your mind, after a certain reasonable effort, then go on to another consideration, – only be quiet and simple, and do not be eager or hurried⁶.

This operation is *tasting word* in which the whole man is engaged; however, the special role belongs to reason since every human being is constituted by the act of knowing⁷. Among older Christian works it could be pointed out the topic of *ruminatio* that is the process of reading com-

⁴ Cf. *The Spiritual Exercises...*, *The Second Method of Prayer* [252].

⁵ *The Spiritual Exercises...*, *The Second Method of Prayer* [254].

⁶ Cf. St. Francis of Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, [on:]
http://www.ccel.org/ccel/desales/devout_life.toc.html (18.06.2011).

⁷ Cf. E. Gilson, *Tomizm. Wprowadzenie do filozofii św. Tomasza z Akwinu*, Warszawa 1960, p. 276.

pared with eating. If just reading of the Holy Scripture (*lectio*) reminds taking food into mouth so the meditation (*meditatio*), the next step of spiritual exercises, is like the function of dividing food by teeth to be absorbed. After that contemplation (*contemplatio*) is equal to the status of a fed man who for this reason feels cheer and strong. Contemplation⁸ in the thoughts of the ancient and medieval Christian writers appears as a natural consequence of the work of mental prayer. It is time to enjoy the divine reality present on the earth and in the life of a man. Borrowing some elements from the definition of Eucharistic adoration it can be said that the contemplation consists in *a joy at the truth*⁹, that is *at Jesus* who has introduced Himself as a way, truth and life (cf. J 14, 6). The contemplation may be named a vivacious experience of this reality.

In the Church's doctrine of spirituality two concepts of contemplation are singled out. The first, *infused contemplation*, is the very special gift given by God in order to lead the mystical life in the deep obedience to the Holy Spirit. St. John of the Cross comprehends this grace as an infused and amatory knowledge of God¹⁰, which was depicted in the love of the bride and the bridegroom in Song of the Songs. This kind of contemplation, being sometimes the passive night of senses or of soul, serves as a tool in the hands of God to purify, to enlighten the soul till it is united with Him in the transforming unification. However, contemplation has the other meaning when is completed by the adjective *acquired*. It concerns the prayer which is a consequence of the cooperation of human being with God's ordinary grace and since it could be achieved by the man's activity with no special intervention of the Holy Spirit. R. Garrigou-Lagrange writes:

Acquired contemplation is generally defined by those who admit its existence at the end of meditation as a simple and loving knowledge of God and of His works, which is the fruit of our personal activity aided by grace. It is commonly agreed that the theologian possesses the contemplation called "acquired" at the end of his research in the synthetic view which he reaches. This is also the case with the preacher who sees his whole sermon in one central thought, and in the faithful who listen attentively to this sermon, admire its unity and, as a result, taste the great truth of faith which they see in its radiation.

In these cases there is a certain contemplation that proceeds from faith united to charity and from a more or less latent influence of the gifts of understanding, wis-

⁸ In connection with prayer (*oratio*) like in the most popular apprehension of prayer structure coming from *Scala paradisi* by Guigo the Carthusian. He enumerates the four stages in the following order: *lectio – meditatio – oratio – contemplatio* (cf. S. Tugwell, *Drogi niedoskonałości*, trans. A. Gomola, Poznań 2006, p. 103–138).

⁹ Cf. R. Cantalamessa, *Eucharystia – nasze uświęcenie. Tajemnica Wieczery Pańskiej*, trans. A. J. Ziębik, Warszawa 1994, p. 87.

¹⁰ Cf. St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, II 5, 1.

dom, and knowledge. But this admiring knowledge would not exist if, for lack of a higher inspiration, the human activity of the preacher had not carefully arranged the ideas in such a way as to bring out their harmony¹¹.

Therefore the *acquired contemplation* is equal to the upper stage of meditating mind and to the form known as “a prayer of simplicity”¹². In this sense St. Ignatius draws on the word “contemplation” in his *Spiritual Exercises*. Here meditation becomes contemplation.

When meditation and acquired contemplation are compared with an epigram in respect of being the object of slow attention it turns out that the latter could be sometimes a form of the former. The shortness of epigram reflects the special moment of stopped work of mind when mental prayer is restricted to a narrow but meaningful form. This literary genre, made up of few words, is really like one flower on which a bee is sitting to catch nectar.

Beside the feature of length there is the second fundamental element connecting two works. It is a conceit comprehended as a special composition of text which betokens some surprising meaning as a result of a new act of reason. Continuously the conceit can be compared with a flower in regard of having subtle structure wherein food is hidden:

Conceit: an unusually far-fetched or elaborate metaphor or simile presenting a surprisingly apt parallel between two apparently dissimilar things or feelings¹³.

Reading the Holy Scripture during *lectio divina* and meditation mind is impressed by some exciting element and so this is a conceit which easily could be this factor. Facing up the conceit allows to draw the whole content of words so that it is truthfully *tasting word*, a kind of *ruminatio* described by the classics¹⁴.

For that the concept of *rereading* seems to be very useful because the conceit presupposes that the text should be read once and maybe once again in order to see more than with a single ordinary look. This Crashaw’s verse expresses this need:

“On the still surviving Marks of our Saviour’s”

Whatever story of their cruelty,
Or nail, or thorn, or spear have writ in Thee,

¹¹ G. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, III 31, [on:] <http://www.christianperfection.info/ta80.php#bk2>, (18.06.2011).

¹² Cf. G. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages...*, *ibid*; A. Słomkowski, *Teologia życia duchowego*, Ząbki 2000, p. 225.

¹³ *Conceit*, [in:] *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, ed. C. Baldick, Oxford–New York 1990, p. 42.

¹⁴ Obviously it occurs only in a religious poem.

Are in another sense
 Still legible;
 Sweet is the difference:
 Once I did spell
 Every red letter
 A wound of Thine;
 Now, what is better,
 Balsam for mine¹⁵.

This short verse contains the motive of writing which is really striking because it concerns Christ's passion. This idea is built on the verse from Is 49, 16: "Jerusalem, I can never forget you! I have written your name on the palms of my hands"¹⁶.

Writing functions as a name of the Saviour's suffering which has been developed here in a number of dimensions. His body becomes the material; the nail, thorn and spear are the tools on account of the characteristics of the pointed tip which reminds a shape of a pen; the form of this "working" is a story while the essence of this is cruelty¹⁷.

All this makes the first stratum of meaning i.e. the "story of cruelty" but this text stays on as "still legible" and it wants to be read "in another sense" which must be a deeper one. Right here there lies a starting point of Crashaw's conceit¹⁸. The subject tries to read once more "every red letter" that is in other words every Christ's wound. The association is founded on the similarity between colour of blood and of ink. This process of rereading is being concentrated on the subsequent elements to know them more exactly ("I did spell / every red letter...") but it turns out to be a property of mental prayer indeed. As a consequence the subject gets the second meaning of wounds which not ceasing to be a "story of cruelty" is also a medicine. This kind of knowing recalls a phenomenon of palimpsest, but the relation between two strata seems to be most interesting. Discovering more in the same texture a man experiences the "sweet difference", since he sees that the sense of wound has been converted. Thus they were before associated with pain and death and now they are "balsam" not only for themselves but after all "for mine" i.e. for

¹⁵ <http://www.poemhunter.com/richard-crashaw/poems/page-2/> (18.06.2011).

¹⁶ The Holy Bible cited according to: *Good News Bible with The Deuterocanonical Books also called The Apocrypha*, The Bible Societies, Harper Collins 1994.

¹⁷ The term „story" points out the narrative comprehension of the Passion in which the wounds reflect aftermath of deeds of human hands.

¹⁸ Taking for granted that the association between wounds and the effect of writing is not numbered as the original *Crashaw's* conceit. H. Gardner writes that the XVII c. religious poetry is built upon a scheme of thought that is not the poet's own invention, but belongs to the systems that have been debated over for centuries (cf. H. Gardner, *Seventeenth-century Religious Poetry*, [in:] idem, *Religion and Literature...*, p. 193).

the subject's wounds. Here arises the topic of life-giving death which evokes once again the prophecy of Isaiah: "But because of our sins he was wounded, beaten because of the evil we did. We are healed by the punishment he suffered made whole by the blows he received" (Is 53, 5).

The conceit helps to catch and contemplate the topic of Redemption with the mystery of Jesus' cross. In this light the human experience of suffering (the first stratum) has been fulfilled with the theological truth getting its supernatural sense. In the depth of paradox it turns out that the wounds are the genuine medicine. It is indeed the topic that provokes mind to stop itself in order to gaze at this new reality revealed in the darkness of the cross. This way of reading the conceit, when the effect of *acutum* is appearing to enchant the mind, is equivalent to the stirring moment of meditating reason so that "spelling every letter" during the process of literary rereading means "tasting words" in mental prayer.

There is also one question in the field of meditation. This is a relationship when the activity of mind forms the resolution of free will which next expresses itself in some particular decisions as for prayer, fasting, deeds of mercy etc. The conceptual meditation seems to be devoid of this. But this impression is easy to explain if the connection shown above is taken into consideration. The moment when the experience of *acutum* becomes a door to acquired contemplation is equal only to the part of the whole process i.e. to work of mind which may and should be followed by the act of will. Its effectiveness depends on quality of what was before since the deep mental experience of religious truth in the reading of conceit determines activity of so touched will. If the will of human person seeks to catch the genuine goodness it is clear that the conceit can help this when it reveals what this reality is like.

THE MYSTERIES OF JESUS' LIFE IN THE SHARPNESS OF THE CONCEIT

In its history privileged objects of meditation were mysteries of Christ's life as it was stressed in medieval prayer (*devotio moderna*). Those elements were the consequence of rediscovering the Saviour's humanity functioning as a way to divinity which dates back to at least the XII c. with a figure of St. Bernard of Clairvaux. Christ-centrism in prayer means that a work of mind seeks to get some fresh reading of the Good News. An author of meditation is tasked with it, and since some form of meditation (or contemplation) can exist in conceit, it is a special challenge for a poet. Richard Crashaw responds to it in a very charming way¹⁹ al-

¹⁹ H. Gardner describes the metaphysical poets' achievements: "They use the language of educated men appropriately adapted to their subject and treatment; splendid and resourceful, as

lowing to have a new look at Jesus' life. It is interesting to know how he reaches these effects and how elements of rhetorics operate in favour of this.

The first analysed group of epigrams concerns Jesus' life viewed by a motive of some *liquids*. The topic of martyrdom arises in the context of children with little Jesus in the background and the typical baroque opposition between life and death originates the conceit:

“Upon the Infant Martyrs”

To see both blended in one flood
The Mothers Milke, the Childrens blood,
Makes me doubt if Heaven will gather,
Roses hence, or *Lilies* rather²⁰.

The clue of this text is a tension between numbers one and two (evoked by a word “both”). Two sorts of fluid are shown against one flood, as blended by Herod's servants. This state is a sign of death since a difference between milk and blood makes a condition of life. Two substances are ascribed to two groups of persons so that mothers' milk helps children's life (blood). As long as two sorts of liquid remain in their own circulations it means life; blending them (i.e. number one) is equivalent to death. Continuing, a rhetoric figure of thought called *dubitatio* introduces a special perspective: when the subject expresses its own doubt. He orders to consider whether “Heaven” takes from martyrs' bodies “Roses” or “Lilies”. One pair of words is supplemented by the next pair of name of flowers so that lilies are a sign of milk and roses are linked to blood on the basis of similarity of colour²¹. Also the rhymed words: “gather” – “rather” suggest the perspective of choice which however turns out to be an artificial vision made by the author. The art of rhetoric presupposes a creation of new order of case (*causa*) named in Latin *amplificatio*. It is nothing else but accentuating some aspects of case by many means. Here the situation is depicted as if Heaven were to choose *only one* flower coming from one liquid but indeed nothing interferes with getting both elements! The author's operation has been unmasked in order to uncover the depth of the sense. By this illusion the whole theological richness of event is shown. Asking about the choice the author gives a dynamic feature to

in Milton and Crashaw [...]”, H. Gardner, *Seventeenth-century Religious Poetry*, [in:] idem, *Religion and Literature...*, p. 193.

²⁰ *The New Penguin Book of English Verse*, ed. P. Keegan, 2001, p. 285.

²¹ Colours of whiteness and redness refer to innocence and martyrdom, which is better observable in the context of rather the Roman-Catholic Church tradition than general knowledge of symbols (cf. *Biały, Czerwony*, [in:] W. Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli*, Warszawa 2006).

meditation because when one has to choose something he must see better its worth before. In this false dilemma each element is pointed out more strongly. The children in fact are characterized by double glory of martyrdom and innocence which is the proper topic of this meditation stirred by the rhetoric figure of *dubitatio*.

From the life of Jesus the other event is represented in Crashaw's output. An epigram *On the Water of our Lord's Baptism* is also built on two sorts of liquid so that "water" and "tears" remind the above verses but they are enriched with a motive of "a gem" resulting in a new relation:

"On the Water of our Lord's Baptism"

Each blest drop on each blest limb,
Is wash't itself, in washing Him:
Tis a gem while it stays here;
While it falls hence 'tis a tear²².

By the means of drops of water the figure of Christ is well sketched wherefore each drop points out the body of the Saviour. This is all-around indication of Him, which fulfills the crucial function of mental prayer. Aside this figure is marked by instrumentation of syllable "h" in such words: "Him", "here", "hence", referred to Jesus. But the attention of reader (or prayer) is directed to the motive of water to show the perspective of its possible transformation, which comes out from sainthood of the Lord and so tells of Him indeed. The second line embraces the first aspect: washing Jesus' body causes sanctification to such an extent that water could be said to wash itself, though really it is done through Jesus. This place is followed by a pair of relations (lines 3–4)²³ opening a perspective of a possible transformation of water. Two substances derive their identity from their own positions towards Christ: as long as a drop rests on His body it is "a gem" but when it falls it becomes "a tear"²⁴.

Likewise in the previous text the mind is being confronted by two (still the same number!) ways of possible states of water. They both mean two precious things reaching the person and natures of Jesus. The metaphor "water" and "gem" is based on similarity of physical, visual properties like "brightness", "clearness", "brilliancy" and represents the beauty and sanctifying power of the Lord's body. Whereas the drop falling is

²² <http://www.poemhunter.com/richard-crashaw/poems/page-2/> (18.06.2011).

²³ Taking account of the aftermath of categories: substance – position – position – substance this order can be interpreted as a chiasmus (cf. *Chiasmus*, [in:] *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms...*, p. 34).

²⁴ This epigram recalls the other famous poem by Crashaw: "The Tear" developing a motive of Mary's tear in a series of artistic metaphors.

named “a tear”, which is motivated by likeness of movement. This latter trope stresses a worth of what Jesus loses: He is being abandoned by drops of water. The process of drying does not matter here at all yet flowing water bears a feature of pain since it is identified with “a tear”. It could be said that this sentence applies to Jesus’ passion as its forecast according to the old theological tradition which sees His baptism as a moment of public declaration of the Messiah’s mission of redemption via the cross. As a result two tropes reveal the richness of Christ’s life from His divine glory to passion in the field determined by His two natures: this divine (“a gem”) and this human (“a tear”) one. *On the Water...* brings a perspective of meditation built on the analogous rules of conceit as *Upon the Infant Martyrs*.

Among Crashaw’s epigrams concerning the area of Jesus’ miracles there is one using the motive of transformed water too. Its starting point is turning water into wine during the wedding in Cana:

“To our Lord, upon the Water Made Wine”

Thou water turn’st to wine, fair friend of life,
Thy foe, to cross the sweet arts of thy reign,
Distills from thence the tears of wrath and strife,
And so turns wine to water back again²⁵.

This short poem is addressed to Jesus evoked by the help of instrumentation of syllable “f” in the following sequence: “fair friend of life”, which points out the semantic relation of these words. Christ’s good will (triple “f”) results in the transformation of water into wine which is marked by the same initial “w”. The first line describing the miracle is contrasted with the second one with a figure of the Lord’s “foe”. This confrontation is not restricted to the only presence but also embraces the activity of the evil, since he most probably stands for “thy foe”. The enemy is doing three actions: first he wants to cross the rules of Jesus’ kingdom. The word “cross” meaning ‘to oppose’ recalls this very special thing – the cross on which the Saviour will stretch His arms. By means of this allusion the first miracle is connected with the time of passion which constitutes the culminating point of this rebel.

Crossing the rules receives a form of distillation of the tears from wine signifying the reality touched with Christ’s grace. The essence of doing consists in producing “wrath” and “strife” which express themselves in tears. Tempting human freedom the evil can change peaceful life for conflicts which leads into conclusion that the development of Heaven King-

²⁵ <http://www.poemhunter.com/richard-crashaw/poems/page-2/> (18.06.2011).

dom is conditioned by a human ability to make a choice although this theological context is put here by virtue of indirect association.

The result of this is the striking verse including a motive of converted transformation: while before water was changed into wine now wine is being turned into water. This *second* water means obviously “tears” on the basis of their likeness. The divine perspective of sweet life is really crossed, which is said in a painful way. Losing grace is accentuated by the opposition in rhymes: “life” is replaced by “strife” yet the rejection of “reign” is reflected in “back again”, which applies to the topic of possible vainness of God’s love in the face of human freedom with its decisions. In the fourth line the same words beginning with “w” appear but in a characteristic order: here wine is followed by water. There is another interesting effect stressing the semantic references that is a sound similarity of words representing the action of evil: “turns”, “water”, “tears”. All the means of the poem create the atmosphere of sadness and horror so this piece may be indeed a part of meditation on sins and temptations close to Ignatius’ propositions from the first week of *Spiritual exercises*.

Imagination and mental work of a poet result in a series of very short poems in which every word is important. Linguistic and poetical ways bring some kind of vision that could be an element of religious experience during prayer. Highlighting some requisites, like a motive of liquids, draws the attention to consider the Jesus’ life through them. Rhetorical invention (*inventio*), artificial order (*dispositio*) and stylistic expressiveness (*elocutio*) are the area wherein the conceit is born. This is the conceit which makes with its sharpness a point of reference for a meditating person.

MEDITATION VIA SELECTED REQUISITES

The topic of Jesus’ death occupies a privileged place in conceptual imaginary and thought being an outstanding example of Christ-centrism. Crossing the highest divinity with a depth of human humbleness provokes mind to find some ways of religion and poetical, rhetorical expression. Also in this process the very important role is played by an operation of the selection so as a part could say something about the whole (*pars pro toto*). Richard Crashaw does not miss this very fruitful way so that his masterly epigrams could not only draw the attention but also keep it there for an intellectual mental prayer opened for contemplation. A good occasion to do it is a time after the Saviour’s death because this is a natural period of stopped events which could be fulfilled with feelings, sorrow and

pain of Our Lady receiving the Body of Son from a cross and burying it in a tomb.

Crashaw just like Mary looks at this body calling it with very characteristic epithets: “naked and bloody” in which an ideal program is contained in. The fruit of glance is that:

“Upon the Body of Our Blessed Lord, Naked and Bloody”

They ‘have left thee naked, Lord, O that they had!
This garment too I would they had deny’d.

Thee with thy self they have too richly clad;
Opening the purple wardrobe in thy side.

O never could there be garment too good
For thee to wear, But this, of thine own Blood²⁶.

This compact iambic pentameter represents Christ as passive object of people’s actions which is marked by the personal pronouns: “thee” and “they” repeated in the next lines. The main question (because conceptual poetry does not live without any question) is what they have done to Him indeed. The first observation brings a very realistic drawing of Passion already made. The body of Christ has been left naked and this motive of undressing (or dressing) is essential here²⁷. Naked body as a special, ultimate state of humbling and death recalls the situation of Joseph from the Old Testament as a figure of Christ (cf. Gen 37, 29–35).

But in Crashaw’s epigram more things were said. Continuing the observation of people’s action the subject remarks a strike of a spear opening Jesus’ side (cf. 19, 34). Here it entails the next association therefore it is said that “the purple wardrobe” was opened in Jesus’ side. Via similarity of colour it refers to His sacred heart making the beautiful metaphor. As a wardrobe *supplies* some clothes so this heart gives a new kind of clothes. Naked Christ is dressed with His own blood that is “with thy self” and he is “too richly clad” what shows some conspicuous excess of His passion²⁸.

The third distich strengthens this look by an exclamation directed to Christ. Once again making the metaphorical connection between garment

²⁶ *Seventeenth Century Poetry. The Schools of Donne and Jonson*, ed. H. Kenner, New York 1964, p. 243.

²⁷ The situation when the garment was taken off of Christ betokens only once directly the presence of the subject of the poem in this expression: “I would”, which here is equal to ‘I wish’, (cf. *An Anthology for Students. English Literature*, ed. K. Fordoński, vol. 1, p. 347).

²⁸ This thesis is understandable allowing that even one drop of His blood was enough to save the whole world.

and blood occurs and here both parts of trope are revealed. Meanings are stressed by rhymes and so “Blood” is characterized by “good” in order to show that blood is the most precious piece of clothing, most suitable to be worn by Christ. Before the last brilliant conclusion it is worth saying that in the cross-rhymed lines form 1 to 4 the people’s actions (“had”, “deny’d”), constituting the first distich are fulfilled with proper rhymes (“clad”, “side”) from the second stanza. In this way actions gathered in one place are strongly confronted by their result. It leads to the observation of the difference between their intention and a genuine consequence of their actions. Wishing to put Christ into a humblest state they caused something opposed: behold the greatest treasure has appeared and they are won by their own arms.

It is a time to answer the question of this poem: indeed the people wounding Christ have released His deep beauty. The title sequence of epithets expresses the relation of two orders. “Naked” body especially refers to the human nature of Christ, touched with dead pain, but “bloody” is a transitive element linking sorrow to the figurative sense when wounds and blood turns out to be the rich garment. The realistic event from Golgotha gets its own double justification. In the field of a language this is a power of metaphor which makes one able to reinterpret reality. Proclamation of trope functions here as an act of disagreement and of search for the proper sense. But this achievement is only of subjective character; in order to change it into something objective it is needed to appeal to the other stratum of reality which is theology. Herein in the Jesus’ sermon during the Last Supper the topic of suffering to come has its deeper sense in glory. He is asking the Father: “Father! Give me glory in your presence now, the same glory I had with you before the world was made” (J 17, 5).

The cross in theological view is the revelation of divine glory of the Son so the metaphor of “blood” and “garment” could present this ideal context. Thanks to this relation the daring statements of poetry are covered by the truth of the God’s word.

In *Upon the Body of Our Blessed Lord...* the reader’s attention is being kept by the figurative sense of liquid by which this epigram is linked to the group of works analysed above so as the area of possible comprehension is enlarged. Blood was compared to roses before and now is done to the rich cloth²⁹. It is easy to remark that conceits often contain together topics of life and death because a possible scale of experience here is widest and an appeal to imagination and mind is strongest. Likewise in the

²⁹ Notice that also water of baptism (called “gem”) and blood of passion have something in common by means of feature of preciousness.

case of a pair “milke” and “wine” also the following verse strikes with a sharpness of vision:

“Upon Our Saviours Tombe Wherein Never Man was Laid”

How Life and Death in Thee
 Agree?
 Thou had'st a virgin Wombe
 And Thombe.
 A *Joseph* did betroth
 Them both³⁰.

In this one of the most lapidary verses the connection between life and death is signalled in the first and second lines. The way of rhyming plays the crucial role so as to expose meanings. It draws on the effect of echo when a repetition refers to a former word as its meaningful supplement. Here this manner is accompanied by breaking the structure of iambic tetrameter to get the trimeter plus one-foot iambic end. A pair: “Thee” – “Agree” signifies that it is in Jesus that this correlation happens so that His life may be described by these concepts.

The initial thesis is motivated by the second part wherein to Christ are ascribed two rhymed words: “Wombe” and “Tombe” joined with the essential epithet: “virgin”. The point that Jesus found “a virgin Wombe” in His Mother is very clear for it is a well-known theological theme. But the motive of “a virgin Wombe” bears on itself some figurative trace and corresponds with the title getting from there its own justification: “a virgin Tombe” really means “Tombe Wherein Never Man was Laid”. The dogma as a principal rule of the first motive (“Wombe”) is juxtaposed with the quite realistic observation (Tombe”) which here receives the metaphorical tenor.

Both words develop the main topic: as “a Wombe” recalls life so “a Tombe” points out death; however, the common epithet provokes to cross these directions and to observe the mutual exchange of senses. In this way “a Wombe” is lightened by a mark of death; indeed the period of being in mother’s womb could be comprehended as a kind of absence in the visual world. But the second possibility is much stronger: here “a Tombe” derives its feature from “a Wombe” so that leaving a grave for glorious life is like being born. Jesus’ tomb is a place wherein a new life manifests itself to all the world therefore the earth could be named His *mother* too.

³⁰ *The New Penguin Book of English Verse...*, p. 285.

The third distich contains the most curious statement because the “Wombe” and “Tombe” have something common in *Joseph* although it concerns not the same person. This is really unusual association of two figures in the background of facts. In connection with them here arises a question what the verb “betroth” means. Perhaps it may be a piece of sophisticated, witty junction which dazzles with its sharpness and characterizes metaphysical poetry. In this case rhetorical function *delectare* would dominate over *docere* being an exhibition of author’s poetical power and having no deeper theological relevance. But on the other side both Josephs really did betroth “them both”, that is the “Wombe” and the “Tombe”. Joseph from Nazareth married Mary before the conception of Jesus whereas Joseph of Arimathea “did betroth” a grave by an act of possession. They stand in the starting points of two crucial theological events: the incarnation and the resurrection.

One more a short verse helps to give a poetical and theological look into the mystery of Christ’s death. Keeping the same motive of grave the poet writes:

“On the Sepulchre of Our Lord”

Here, where our Lord once laid his Head,
Now the grave lies buried³¹.

The clue of this piece is a striking confrontation of the realistic description of the first line with the figurative sentence of the next one. For a reader of Bible the gesture of laying Christ’s Head is a classical periphrasis of death however the second line hides the more unusual conceit. The grave is depicted as “a person who lies”. A very important word: “buried” shows that the grave is buried in other words that a place of burial is buried in itself. This entails that this strange expression, this oxymoron means an end of something what was an end before and opens a new logical perspective: now a finish of the same finish really gives a continuous act of lasting like in mathematics minus with minus works out plus. If one name it in the words: “a death of death” they will be nearby the meaningful biblical context of Hosea from the Old and St. Paul from the New Testament (cf. Hos 13, 14; 1 Cor 15, 54–56).

Condensed language of Crashaw opens the perspective of consideration and contemplation of theological mystery and especially of Christ. Indeed his well selected and ordered words with a striking power give the

³¹ <http://www.poemhunter.com/richard-crashaw/poems/page-2/> (18.06.2011).

outline of the problem that could be fulfilled with the whole engagement of mental prayer. It is really a place where a thought could rest to be nourished by divine power of a word.

* * *

The analysis of the relation between a field of meditation and epigram representing domain of poetry shows that they have some common place which seems to be a very interesting object for further research. In the process of reading verses as well as in meditation one could be drawn in order to concentrate on some words, an image, a motive which allow to open their mind to receive more and more on the way of reason and will with a help of imagination.

The privileged sign of that is an intriguing moment and a kind of spiritual satisfaction while the aim means on one hand a process of rereading the text so as to discover its deeper theological sense and on the other hand an opportunity to contemplate an object in a way of acquired contemplation following ordinary mental prayer. This drawing role is successfully played by a conceit which let someone catch and contemplate e.g. the topic of Redemption with the mystery of Jesus' passion to fulfill the human experience of suffering with the theological truth and supernatural sense when in the depth of paradox it turns out that the wounds are the genuine medicine. This way of reading the conceit, when the effect of *acutum* is appearing to enchant the mind, is equivalent to the stirring moment of meditating reason so that "spelling every letter" during the process of literary rereading means "tasting words" in mental prayer.

The epitome of these proprieties is a collection of epigrams by Richard Crashaw. Their Christ-centrism expresses itself in taking into consideration selected mysteries of Jesus' life presented in the sharpness of meanings crossed in conceit. It is done via requisites like sorts of fluid or a tomb which show some important aspects of events as well as a variety of poetical and rhetorical means. This young English poet created short verses that strike a reader's attention and prompt it to consider the prepared literary form and to meditate or contemplate the mystery of Saviour realizing a significant element of the Roman Catholic Church's theory of meditation. The poetical genius of the author supported by good artistic work and connected with his religion zeal causes that this ability of drawing of a reader works still in the stirring and charming way.

A MIND DRAWN BY A WORD
A MEDITATIVE DIMENSION OF SELECTED EPIGRAMS
BY RICHARD CRASHAW (1612–1649)

Summary

The analysis of the relation between religious meditation and epigram representing do-main of poetry shows their own common place, a very interesting matter for further research. Reading verses as well as meditating could draw one's mind to concentrate on an intriguing sign for some time. The process of rereading the text supplies deeper theological senses, spiri-tual satisfaction and an opportunity to contemplate an object in a way of acquired contempla-tion following ordinary mental prayer. This drawing role is successfully played by a conceit, when its form (*acutum*) enchants the mind and it is equivalent to the stirring moment of medi-tating reason.

The epitome of these proprieties is a collection of epigrams by Richard Crashaw. Their Christ-centrism expresses itself in taking into consideration selected mysteries of Jesus' life presented in the sharpness of meanings crossed in conceit. It is done via accurately selected requisites as well as a variety of poetical and rhetorical means. This young English poet cre-ated short verses that strike a reader's attention and prompt it to consider the prepared literary form and to meditate or contemplate the mystery of Saviour realizing a significant element of the Roman Catholic Church's theory of meditation. The poetical genius of the author sup-ported by good artistic work and connected with his religion zeal causes that this ability of drawing of a reader works still in the charming way.