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Expression of Literary Wit in the 17th Century English Drama, Poetry and Prose

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INTRODUCTION

Literary wit is a multifaceted phenomenon that has been praised, aspired to, feared and desired throughout the centuries. England has always stood out with its astounding writers and the exceptional quality of their wit. The seventeenth century demonstrates the highest point of its appreciation and application. In fact, it was the century "obsessed with wit: defining it, analysing it, amplifying it, using it, rejecting it, and using it to reject it" (Summers, Pebworth 1995, 1). At the peak of its popularity, literary wit was perceived as evidence of acute intelligence. It inspired and induced the use of words in an ingenious manner since it was believed that witty discourse was indicative of the writer's superior intellectual capacity. Despite the fact that, its role later diminished to such an extent that at present it is referred to as mere amusing remarks or catchy one-liners that sometimes adopt a derisive tone. As Benjamin Errett points out: "wit hasn't simply been gently forgotten. It's been misunderstood, redefined and twisted into a meaningless word. <...> [It] once meant good sense that sparkles; we killed it by accusing it of cruelty and memorizing bad jokes instead" (2014, 8). However, intellectually dense literary texts can offer an enlightening engagement in artistic communication. Indeed, the wit-based literary texts from earlier epochs may act as informants passing on a large volume of information about the literary, cultural, religious and social values of a bygone era.

The dissertation focuses on literary wit in the heyday of its glory, i.e. on the seventeenth-century creative oeuvre of the English playwrights, poets and prose writers. **The object of this thesis** is literary wit in selected pieces by the most prominent authors representing seventeenth–century English drama, poetry and prose. The analysis of literary wit encompasses different categories of literary composition (drama, verse and prose) in order to reveal the diversity of the expressive patterns of wit. For reasons of space constraints, the true value of the witty eloquence of the given period is recovered from recognised texts that have been acclaimed in various anthologies as the key texts of the seventeenth-century English literary canon. The list contains the following selected dramas: tragedy *The Duchess of Malfi* (c. 1612-1613 published in 1623) by John Webster (1580–1634), parody *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (c. 1607 published in 1613) by Francis Beaumont (1584–1616), comedy *Wit Without Money* (c. 1614 published in 1639) by John Fletcher (1579–1625), satirical play *The Rehearsal* (1671) by the Second Duke of Buckingham George Villiers (1628–1687) and comedy *The Country Wife* (1675) by William Wycherley (1641–1716); the following selected poems: *Holy Sonnet XVIII* (1620), *A Hymn*

to God the Father (1633), *The Flea* (1633), and *Elegy XIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed* (1654) by John Donne (1572–1631); *Love III* (1633) by George Herbert (1593–1633); *The Wits* (1637) by John Suckling (1609–1641); *But Men Loved Darkness Rather than Light* (1646), *In the Holy Nativity of Our Lord God* (1646), *On Our Crucified Lord, Naked and Bloody* (1646), and *The Weeper* (1646) by Richard Crashaw (1613–1649); *The Dwelling-Place* (1655), *The Waterfall* (1655), and *The Retreat* (1655) by Henry Vaughan (1621–1695); *On My First Son* (1616) by Ben Jonson (1572–1637); *To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time* (1648), *Her Legs* (1648), *Long and Lazy* (1648), and *To a Maid* (1648) by Richard Herrick (1591-1674); *My Dyet* (1647), *Against Fruition* (1656), and *Enjoyment* (1656) by Abraham Cowley (1618–1667); *The Gallery* (1650), *Eyes and Tears* (1681), and *To His Coy Mistress* (1681) by Andrew Marvell (1621–1678), *A Satyr against Reason and Mankind* (1674) by the Earl of Rochester John Wilmont (1647–1680); *Mac Flecknoe: A Satire upon the True-blue Protestant Poet T.S.* (1682) by John Dryden (1631–1700); and these pieces of prose: *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* (1578) by John Lyly (1554–1606) and *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1624) by John Donne.

The thesis **aims** to reveal literary wit as a means of artistic communication in the selected seventeenth-century English drama, poetry and prose.

For the aim of the thesis to be achieved, the following **objectives** have been set out:

➢ To overview the research carried out pertaining to wit and distinguish the qualities which characterise literary wit in particular;
➢ To explore the development of the conception of literary wit from the historical perspective and situate it in the context of other related terms;
➢ To discuss the taxonomy of literary wit, its modes, devices and functions;
➢ To describe the principal ideas of Lotman's cultural semiotics as a methodological framework for the empirical research;
➢ To examine the instances of literary wit in the selected pieces of seventeenth-century English drama, poetry and prose in the light of cultural semiotics and by applying the theory on the modes, devices and functions of wit.

The relevance and novelty of the research. Literary wit has been selected as a relevant and novel object of research as it has rarely been the object of literary criticism. Since wit is frequently identified as a subset of humour and studied from this perspective, there are very few extensive works exploring literary wit as a separate object of scientific inquiry. As the

conception of wit has undergone great changes from its origin to this day, the contemporary conception of wit has inevitably become very distant from that prevalent in the seventeenth century. It should be noted that approaching the literary wit of seventeenth-century English literature from the above-mentioned contemporary perspective might be misleading and lead to its misinterpretation. Moreover, such a narrow consideration of wit as a mere subset of humour would limit the overall understanding of a literary work and restrict it to a superficial level. Without the pre-existing knowledge that seventeenth-century wit does not offer a light experience of reading but, on the contrary, requires an extensive and very cautious probing, the reader may easily oversee the occurrence of a witty expression if it is not merely funny, or disregard it as it might be too confusing to grasp, and thus miss the chance of truly enjoying it. This might dangerously lead to loss of interest in literary texts saturated with serious wit.

Thus, this thesis is among the few aiming at the exploration of wit as a rational structural element of a literary work. Moreover, as a medium of collective knowledge, literary wit withstands the flow of time and is able to affect the ever-changing human comprehension. Therefore, the act of interpreting witty literary texts is a challenging intellectual experience exposing the readers to literary practices and cultural heritage as rich sources of information about a particular period. Moreover, complex ideas require a proper verbal texture to express them; thus, literary wit helps to comprehend and illuminate burning moral, social and religious issues by conveying them in figurative language.

By examining the notion of wit and through applying a combination of methods for the analysis of the witty discourse of the seventeenth-century English literature described above, the given research is a serious attempt at extending the boundaries of the field of scientific inquiry with regard to the scarcely-analysed phenomenon of literary wit and setting a methodological framework for the prospective investigation of this subject matter.

The thesis offers the following claims:

1. Contemporary definitions of wit do not reveal the entire range of vigour that it is able to achieve. Though generally treated as a subset of humorous entertainment, it may be effectively employed as a rational, yet labyrinthically intricate construal, serious in its nature to produce intellectually charged messages in literary works.
2. Seventeenth-century witty literary texts function as larger cultural texts with a specific inherent artistic model of reality, the interpretation of

which (through the act of artistic communication involving the reader/interpreter, the author, the literary text and its contexts) enables the complex cultural, philosophical, religious and social world-views of the seventeenth-century England to be reconstructed.

3. The complexity of the structure of seventeenth-century English witty literary discourse correlates with the complexity of the information transmitted through it. Therefore, the selected seventeenth-century English writers invoked more devices/modes/functions of wit in their works than are listed in the contemporary taxonomy of wit (distinguished by Donald Duane Manson (1966) and Debra L. Long and Arthur C. Graesser in (2009)). In order to generate the intellectual density of artistic thought, several devices/modes/functions of literary wit can be applied simultaneously in combination with other nonverbal means of expression.

The research methodology. The research is conducted by applying the methodological framework of the semiotics of culture developed by Yuri Mikhailovich Lotman (1922–1993). His insights into the semiotics of culture as well as the socio-communicative functions of an artistic text served as the conceptual basis for understanding and analysing literary wit. Especially beneficial in this respect were these publications: *The Structure of the Artistic Text* (1977), *Semiotics of Culture and the Concept of a Text* (1988), *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (1990), *Culture and Exposition* (2004) and *On the Semiosphere* (2005).

The taxonomy of wit distinguished by Debra L. Long and Arthur C. Graesser in their paper *Wit and Humour in Discourse Processing* (2009) has also been beneficial as it is, perhaps, the only extensive categorisation of wit that is available to this day. This taxonomy and the three main categories embracing the modes, devices and functions of wit based on George Campbell's ideas presented in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776) and further developed by Donald Duane Manson in the work *Bernard Shaw's Use of Wit in Selected Speeches* (1966) helped to organise the research in an efficient way.

The theoretical implications of the paper are based mostly on the insights of the following scholars: Bruce Michelson's study *Literary Wit* (2000), the volume *The Wit of Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (1995) edited by Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth, Paul Joel Freeman's *Wit in English* (2009), A. J. Smith's *Metaphysical Wit* (2006), Benjamin Errett's *Elements of Wit. Mastering the Art of Being Interesting* (2014), George Williamson's *The Proper Wit of Poetry* (1961), Rodger D. Lund's paper *Wit, Judgement, and the Misprisions of Similitude* (2004) and Anne Furlong's paper *The Soul of*

Wit: A Relevance Theoretical Discussion (2011). They contributed greatly in developing a comprehensive vision concerning the origin of literary wit and the process of its interpretation.

Michael Billig's *Laughter and Ridicule Towards a Social Critique of Humour* (2005), J. C. Gregory's *The Nature of Laughter* (2014), Charles R. Gruner's *The Game of Humour. A Comprehensive Theory of Why We Laugh* (1997), Rupert D. V. Glasgow's *Madness, Masks, and Laughter: An Essay on Comedy* (1995), Alfred G. K L'Estrange's *History of English Humour* (2006), Harold Nicolson's *The English Sense of Humour and Other Essays* (1968) and Rod A. Martin's *The Psychology of Humour: An Integrative Approach* (2010) have been beneficial in distinguishing the differences between wit and humour in the research carried out.

The structure of the thesis. The thesis comprises an introduction, three chapters, conclusions, and a list of references and data sources. The introduction presents the relevance and novelty of the research matter; it presents the aim, tasks, and claims of the thesis as well as describing the object of the research, its methodology and applied theoretical implications.

The first chapter of the dissertation *Literary Wit as an Artistic Trait of Fictional Discourse* attempts to situate wit within the context of literature by providing the main characteristics of literary wit; it overviews the research on the subject, discusses the notion of wit from the diachronic perspective, and distinguishes wit from other related concepts. This chapter also presents a discussion of the taxonomy of wit.

The second chapter of the thesis *Cultural Semiotics: Text as a Meaning-Generating Mechanism* is devoted to the establishment of the methodological framework to be implemented in the empirical analysis of the texts representing literary wit. It explores the semiotics of culture and its main principles that pertain to artistic texts, the act of reading and interpretation. It also introduces the problems that arise in reading and analysing the discourse of literary wit and surveys the essential steps in the process of wit interpretation.

The third chapter entitled *Manifestations of Wit in 17th Century Literary Works* attempts an examination of various instances of wit in the selected seventeenth-century literary works. It provides an exploration of the different contexts and mechanisms of witty literary discourse.

Finally, the dissertation offers conclusions based on the empirical research and provides general insights and suggestions for further research.

1. LITERARY WIT AS MEANS OF ARTISTIC MODELLING IN FICTIONAL DISCOURSE

To develop a proper understanding of literary wit and to reveal how complex this issue is, an overview of the academic works focusing on witty discourse is presented in this chapter. It has been discovered that studies on wit may take various perspectives, it may be approached with regard to psychology (Freud 2014; Martin 2007, 2010), sociology (Speier 1998; Gould 2008), politics (Lund 2012) art (Gilman 1978), music (Mahabir 1996) etc. Thus, as a term, wit can cover a considerably large subject area, yet this thesis attempts to provide information about the scientific inquiry of wit in the field of literature.

Compared to other verbal expressions, wit seems to acquire considerably little attention from the literary scholars despite its frequent use in literature. There is a general tendency of viewing wit through the lens of humour which is treated as an umbrella term embracing the concept of wit. Yet, even those researchers who incorporate wit into the general theories of humour rarely explore it in more detail and are apt to apply the term 'wit' synonymously with the term 'humour' (Attardo 1994; Critchley 2002; Ross 2005; Chiaro 2010; Dynel 2011). Only a few scholars acknowledge presence of differences between wit and humour (Morreall 1987, 2009; Alexander 1997; Gruner 1997; Martin 2007; Carroll 2014; Errett 2014). Unfortunately, they do not pursue this issue on any larger scale. There are also studies which contain 'wit' as one of the key terms in their title, but their authors hardly mention it in their discussions (Bain 2007; Cooper 2009). From this it follows that the investigations which consider wit as a subset of humour and explore it as such do not attempt at revealing the originality and complexity of wit, its uniqueness and specific characteristics, or elaborate on its effects on the interlocutors.

The research that is particularly orientated towards the analysis of literary wit could be classified into four groups. The first group of the works dealing with literary wit tend to focus on the term 'wit' and its extrication. For instance, Peter Roberts Klaver elaborates on the very term and its transformations in his dissertation *The Meaning of the Term 'Wit' in English Literary Criticism: 1680-1712* (1965). The author aims to unravel what meanings the term acquired and lost during twenty-two years. However, he does not expand beyond the development of the term in English literary criticism. Actually, it is a purely theoretical exploration of the semantic changes of the term 'wit', as it does not explain how these changes corresponded with the adequate literary trends. In his *The Age of Wit, 1650-*

1750 (1966) Daniel Judson Milburn centres on a protean term 'literary wit'. The scholar also analyses the contexts in which the term appears. This study is beneficial as it helps to clarify the diverse views on wit; nevertheless, the author does not examine the prominence of wit more extensively in any particular literary works relying instead only on sporadic quotations.

The second group of researchers concentrating on literary wit explore the particular authors and their texts (Hill 1993; Martz 1954; Michelson 2000; Reid 2013; Smith 2006; Williamson 1961; Woods 1995). The most influential and persuasive contemporary study on literary wit seems to be Bruce Michelson's *Literary Wit* (2000) which defends wit as a powerful and meaningful attribute of intellectual discourse. The author develops a novel approach to wit and explores the transformations of wit in modern literary discourse, namely in the works of Mark Twain (1835–1910), Oscar Wilde (1854–1900), Tom Stoppard (1937–), Margaret Edson (1961–) and Richard Wilbur (1921–2017). It is an elaborate enquiry into literary wit yet, only in the works of modern authors.

On the contrary, in his book *Metaphysical Wit* (2006) A. J. Smith centres on the role of wit in the literary works of the seventeenth-century Metaphysical poets. The author overviews the theoretical rationale and explores the creative endeavour of the Italian, French, Spanish and English poets to highlight wit as a pivotal integrant of the Metaphysical thought. Most of the discussed authors of this particular study represent the seventeenth century which is the focus of this dissertation as well. However, the scope of Smith's analysis is limited only to verse, whereas this thesis attempts to examine the expression of literary wit in drama, prose and poetry. It should be also noted that a number of studies that are devoted to the analysis of the literary works composed by the seventeenth century authors do extend upon the topic of literary wit but they do not offer any thorough investigation of. Rather, they are apt to include the numerous collections of witty extracts that are followed by no explanations. The critics give short introductory remarks providing the biographical facts or describing the structure of the publication.

The third group of works on literary wit consider the particular historical periods or cultural tendencies that have determined the development of wit (Hill 1993; Summers, Pebworth (eds) 1995; Williamson 1961). For instance, the selected papers titled *The Wit of Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (1995) edited by Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth comprises twelve essays focusing on the operation of wit in literary discourse. As far as this volume aims to contribute to the understanding and informed appreciation of wit, the essays present a multiplicity of its manifestations and critical approaches to it.

The editors explain that while arranging this book they aimed their attention at the seventeenth century English poetry since, in their opinion, this century in particular demonstrated the most astounding examples of literary wit. By combining the papers dealing with the diverse aspects of wit the study confirms the idea that in order to appreciate wit by grasping its essence, the entire literary and cultural atmosphere of alteration should be taken into consideration. This volume was especially beneficial in revealing the complex nature of wit and in recognising that wit is a historically, culturally and individually specific creative phenomenon. It also contributed with regard to the significance of the very contexts of wit, and the diversity of wit in the seventeenth century English literature.

The fourth group of studies examines the mechanisms of literary wit and its evaluation. Paul Joel Freeman's *Wit in English* (2009) deals explicitly with the ""How" and "Why" of wit found in the interplay within language" (Freeman 2009, 11). The author discusses the problem of the employment of wit in poetry, drama and art. He invites the readers to inspect the discourse of wit more thoroughly and thus fully experience the pleasure of wit evoked by an intricate intellectual play with language. Moreover, Freeman encourages "to revive the dying art of [witty] conversation" (ibid., 11). The critic describes the rhetorical and contextual basis of wit, its types and explains the process of wit production. Freeman's exploration of the differences between humour and wit are also worth considering. Especially valuable is the chapter emphasising the importance of context in the creation and appreciation of wit. However, as the book progresses, the author tends to integrate wit into the domain of humour by analysing the place of wit in the field of humour. Anne Furlong takes a completely different approach in her paper *The Soul of Wit: A Relevance Theoretic Discussion* (2011). The scholar considers wit as a phenomenon totally separate from humour and focuses her attention on the processes by which witty effects are produced on the reader. She believes that wit can be understood "as a process which produces a particular effect by exploiting universal human communicative abilities and procedures" (2011, 147). The scholar discloses that wit is "a property of the text, the reader or the writer" and claims that "the relationship among these three produces the effect typically perceived or experienced as wit" (ibid., 147-148). However, Furlong does not reveal the role of context to the understanding of wit or distinction between literary and non-literary wit.

In the context of the Lithuanian literary criticism, no extensive studies on the literary wit have been observed. Nevertheless, we do have a prominent seventeenth-century representative of poetic wit, i.e. one of the leading

European Baroque poets Mathias Casimirus Sarbievius (1595–1640). His first poetic works and critical attempts at the analysis of wit reach the times of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (1236–1795). Sarbievius accentuated brevity which is widely considered to be the soul of wit; perhaps, that is the reason why he was mostly interested in the cases of wit in the epigrammatic poetry. In a selection of epigrammatic poetry *Lyricorum libri tres* (1625) the author exhibited his admiration of classical works and their influence on his writing. The poet also gave lectures at Vilnius University and Rome about literary wit and wrote theoretical works on it. His most famous theoretical endeavour *Praecepta poetica* published as late as 1958 consists of five books. The first one titled *De acuto et arguto liber unicus sive Seneca et Martialis* was especially popular in the seventeenth century. In fact, its handwritten copies circulated widely and were known in all Europe (Daukšienė 2014, 106-107). Within this book Sarbievius discloses the differences between sententious utterances and wit. The author refers to wit as sharp or witty style/discourse following Julius Ceasar Scaliger (1484–1558) who lists *acumen* (acuteness/sharpness) and *argutia* (clever use of words/sophistry) as two main features of witty discourse (Scaliger 1586, 90). Sarbievius also describes wit's features (sharpness, surprise, the principle of *discordia concors*) and distinguishes the agents of a witty discourse (the producer of witty discourse and its reader). It could be said that Sarbievius' observations laid the foundations of further studies on wit not only in Lithuania but also abroad.

There are two doctoral theses exploring the writings of Sarbievius and the readers' response to them: *The Reception of Poetics and Poetry of Mathias Casimirus Sarbievius in XVII-XVIII Centuries* (2008) by Živilė Nedzinskaitė and *Religious Poetry of Mathias Casimirus Sarbievius* (2014) by Ona Daukšienė. The former author also published a monograph *Sibi quisque famam scribat heredem: Reception of Mathias Casimirus Sarbievius' Poetics and Poetry in the Educational System of the Jesuits in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 17th-18th Centuries* (2011). However, both authors do not concentrate on wit within his works in particular. There are also a number of scholars who analysed the works of Sarbievius and accentuated his significance in the Lithuanian literary and cultural context (Narbutas 1998; Ulčinaitė 1998; Šarkauskienė 2005, 2006; Nedzinskaitė 2007, 2011; Čaplinskas 2011; Daukšienė 2011a, 2011b). There are several authors as well who mention Sarbievius in their papers when discussing the peculiarities of the Latin epigrammatic poetry (Vaškelienė 2006; Nedzinskaitė 2008, 2012; Daukšienė 2012; Seredžiūtė 2014; Seredžiūtė, Šarkauskienė 2016; Biržietienė 2014, 2016). An extensive study *Brevitas Ornata: Small Literary Forms in*

Publications of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 16ᵗʰ – 17ᵗʰ Centuries by Eglė Patiejūnienė (1998) explores epigrammatic poetry and its derivative forms (e.g. epitaph, epigraph, emblem etc.). However, none of them pursue the analysis of witty discourse. The dissertation *John Donne's Homilies as a Theopoetic Construct* (2001) by Jadvyga Krūminienė reveals the involvement of the Metaphysical conceit, grotesque and paradox in the literary wit in English homiletic prose and is relevant to the present research as it analyses the English literature of the seventeenth century and delves upon the interpretation of the intellectual intricate verbal artistry.

Most of other scientific publications follow a common tendency and focus largely on humour by making brief remarks on wit without introducing a more extensive analysis of literary wit as a distinct literary projection. Inga Vidugirytė's book *The Culture of Laughter* (2012) describes the research of laughter in relation to the ritual, historical and philosophical contexts. The author largely explicates on humour but also casts some light on the term 'wit'. In the chapter "The Philosophy of Laughter"*,* wit is described referring to such eminent figures as Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC–43 BC), Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Jean Paul (1763–1825) and Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860). A more extensive analysis of wit is provided in the subchapter "Laughter and the Hidden Sources of Pleasure: Sigmund Freud". As the title hints, this subchapter focuses on the main ideas of the famous Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). The author discusses Freud's classification of wit, describes the techniques and tendencies of its construction and explicates on the mechanism of evoking pleasure that is involved in the production of wit. She quotes Freud to clarify the differences between humour and wit, yet does not enlarge upon them in the following parts of the book. Moreover, Vidugirytė bases her description of wit on philosophical and psychological studies rather than literary criticism. Other Lithuanian scholars concentrate on the representation of laughter in radio or TV discourse (Aleksandravičiūtė, Vaicekauskienė 2012; Vaicekauskienė 2013), laughter in children's literature and folklore (Skabeikytė-Kazlauskienė 2009; Urba 2013) and its semantics in the sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century sermons (Pajėdienė 2014).

Hence, it seems to be a shared practice in the Lithuanian academia to consider wit as a comic discourse and use 'humour' and 'wit' as interchangeable terms. Several cases of such research might be distinguished: works discussing the peculiarities of humour (Servaitė 2005), papers that focus on the translation of humorous discourse (Bartkuvienė, Stankevičienė 2006; Šidiškytė 2017) and investigations of humour from the sociolinguistic

perspective (Balčiūnienė, Ratnikaitė 2014; Bandoriūtė 2014; Anglickienė, Repšienė 2012).

The novelty of the given thesis, on the contrary to the previously mentioned studies, lies in the exploration of literary wit not as merely funny and amusing artistic expression but rather as a significant domain of intellectual thought. After having reviewed the scientific input into the analysis of literary wit abroad and in Lithuania it becomes evident that wit still remains an understudied and undervalued area. In fact, the studies which position wit entirely within humorous discourse or just analyse only some aspects of the witty texts do not reveal the entire essence of literary wit and therefore reaffirm the demand for a more detailed research from a different perspective. However, since wit is a broad and genre-unrestricted phenomenon, little would be achieved by attempting to describe and analyse any text construed as a witty utterance. Therefore, in this thesis, the focus of attention is directed on witty expressions which are used as means of artistic modelling in literature, i.e. in the selected English drama, poetry and prose composed during the seventeenth century. The author of the dissertation seeks to take a closer look at literary wit as a distinct variety of literary discourse which differs from cases of wit which are based entirely on humour, laughter and amusement or (e.g. witty anecdotes, witty sketches etc.) or wit found in non-literary contexts (e.g. various theme collections of wit and wisdom, wit in communicative practices, wit as an object of psychological analyses etc.). Therefore, several features separating literary wit from the one occurring in non-literary texts should be discussed in order to distinguish its major characteristics and situate wit in a proper literary domain.

The thesis relies on the distinction of literary wit provided by Bruce Michelson. The scholar states that brevity, eloquence and surprise are the primary features of literary wit. In addition, it favours "incongruous congruity" and fosters pleasurable intellectual effects (Michelson 2000, 4). The author also describes the specific qualities that characterize literary wit in particular. Firstly, the scholar stresses that "literary wit is a discourse made distinct by context from wit in other varieties of human utterance and other situations" (ibid., 4-5). This is an important quality of literary wit in particular as in literature "context transforms the utterance, its reception, and its interpretation" (ibid.). Thus, Michelson accentuates the significance of the context[1] in to literary wit and urges to take it into account in the interpretive practices of witty discourse. Literary wit is context-bound which means that

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[1] The term context here denotes "any text that precedes or accompanies any specific signifying unit, and on which its meaning depends" (Martin, Ringham 2000, 43).

any horizon beyond the specific words of a literary work may be relevant in deciphering the meaning of wit. In this thesis, the contexts of a witty statement are going to be understood as "immediately neighbouring signs, or any part of—or the whole of—the remaining text, or the biographical, social, cultural, and historical circumstances in which it is made" (Baldick 2001, 89). In the case of literary wit, context contributes a great deal in grasping the meaning of wit and working out its interpretation. Only the prior knowledge of the context saves many witty utterances from ambiguity, and indeed if the contexts are unknown to the contemporary readers, they require an immense and curious persistence in uncovering the hidden meaning in a new light by discovering new contexts. Yet, at the same time wit generates the fresh perspectives on its interpretation and appreciation.

Secondly, the author states that literary wit "should not be understood or circumscribed as an opposite of, or a suspension of, the thematic seriousness or other varieties of textual or psychological intensity" (Michelson 2000, 4-5). This quality concerns the intention of literary wit. It should not be underestimated, since literary wit can be a centre of the thematic consequence or even a source evoking textual intensity: "not only can literary wit participate in that intensity; it can be a primary source" (ibid.). Michelson, who considers literary wit as a specific discourse, also stresses the idea that it should not be treated as the opposite of seriousness, or a funny relief from the serious literary utterances, nor should it be regarded as an indicator of texts embodying only serious matter (ibid., 1). This is precisely what the next quality highlights.

Thirdly, literary wit cannot be based on the descriptions that have lost their credibility because they were based on the models of consciousness that are no longer productive in the cognitive as well as literary sphere. As noted by Michelson, "literary wit can transcend other limitations imposed, or implied, by outmoded descriptions and definitions within the literary context" (ibid., 4-5). Therefore, an author states that in order to attain not so reductive and modernized understanding of wit a fresh examination of it is needed. Which means that some conventional ideas concerning literary wit should be extended, reconsidered or even rejected and more a cautious approach should be selected which would not limit the interpretation of witty expressions.

Fourthly, the scholar claims that "literary wit can challenge paradigms and categories of analysis within which the literary text itself is created and received, not only with regard to the text in which the literary wit occurs and participates but also with regard to all literary texts and paradigmatic expectations on which modern literary discourse is formed and interpreted"

(ibid.). Hence, literary wit should be dealt with a flexible and open mind as it has the ability to disrupt the standard principles and modes of literary analysis, literary composition and the reception of the text itself. Literary work can interrogate and transform the initial beliefs that the reader brings to it. In doing so, it 'disconfirms' the regular patterns of thinking and makes the readers accept them just the way they are, as literature does not merely reinforce the already present conceptions, "the valuable work of literature violates or transgresses these normative ways of seeing, and so teaches us new codes for understanding" (Eagleton 2011, 68). Moreover, as it is noted by Lotman, literary texts can convey some personality features (Lotman 1988, 55). Therefore, the discourse of literary wit could be treated as a text which can destabilise and reorganise the reader's mentality.

Fifth quality of literary wit concerns its participation in the transmission of literal and cultural values:

> Literary wit plays a role in the formulation, transmission, and conservation of cultural wisdom and in the acquisition and education of constituencies that sustain "serious" literature as a significant cultural practice. "Witty" literary texts have been crucial to articulation and promulgation of literary and cultural values and to revolutions in aesthetic and intellectual style (Michelson 2000, 4-5).

Thus, literary wit has an inherent function of shaping and passing on the preserved cultural and intellectual knowledge. Therefore, the readers of complex witty texts experience literary wit not so much as a comic delight (which is common when readers get engaged with humorous texts) but more as an intellectual insight.

Moreover, describing the sixth quality of literary wit the scholar remarks that "the intellectual life of our culture, paradigms and categories of analysis <...> are being superseded by paradigms more appropriate to a vastly expanded store of knowledge and the consequent reorganization of contemporary experience. In this ongoing revolution in our thinking, literary wit plays a significant role" (ibid.). This last quality emphasizes that literary wit can promote and reflect the changes in the aesthetic taste and intellectual practice of the audience. Therefore, it is always historically, culturally and even individually specific. Moreover, that might also be the reason why wit can remodel the personality since it can both enhance or complicate the comprehension of the act of reading as well as the motions of the mind (ibid., 2). Thus, literary wit is seen as a significantly complex and elaborate device which produces the deeper layered themes and intellectually charged meanings in the literary works in which they are embedded.

Summing up all what has been stated above, literary wit can be distinguished as discourse which is context-bound; able to produce thematic seriousness and cause textual and psychological intensity. It goes beyond the limiting descriptions and outmoded definitions, it can challenge the paradigms of analysis and transform interpretive expectations. It plays an active role in the development of reasoning as well as the formulation, preservation and radiating of the socio-cultural knowledge and values.

Having characterized the qualities of literary wit in particular it is beneficial to consider the development of the term 'wit' in order to better understand its roots, to fit in into the whole fabric of the seventeenth-century thought as well as critical theory and practice of the period; and to move along into more recent history to trace the shifts of wit's meaning, the emphases and values which it represented for writers and critics who applied it.

1.1. The notion of wit from the diachronic perspective

In his book *Studies in Words* firstly printed in 1960, C. S. Lewis declared that "if a man had time to study the history of one word only, *wit* would perhaps be the best word he could choose" (2013, 86). The author's curiosity was aroused by the concept of wit in particular since its meaning has changed during the years both in critical writings and dictionary definitions to such as extent that, as Lewis rightly remarked, "it could provide most perfect examples of the main principles at work in semantic development" (ibid.). The scholar stresses that as rule the definitions of concepts, and wit is one of them, are taken for granted and considered as infallible, but they are, in fact, often misunderstood. Therefore, the scholar looks back to the origin of the term and investigates its shifts of meaning diachronically to confirm that an accepted meaning of 'wit', which was used in Lewis' time and today, is misleading or, as he calls it even "dangerous" (2013, 97).

Contemporary scholar Michelson supports this insight maintaining that literary wit is somewhat undervalued since, "because of deference to values rooted in bygone ideologies and cultural eras, misunderstanding abounds as to what modern wit can be, how it can work, and how and why it can matter" (2000, 1). Therefore, it is beneficial to discuss the term *wit* from the historical perspective in more detail, disclose its initial meaning and retrace various etymological shifts that the term has undergone during the centuries. The understanding the complexity of the term is crucially important since the alterations of wit's meaning not only affected the critical evaluation of wit but also its application and operation in literary oeuvre. The thesis explores the seventeenth-century literary wit which, according to Caude J. Summers and

Ted-Larry Pebworth, had multiple, overlapping and sometimes even contradictive meanings:

> Wit variously and alternately and sometimes simultaneously signifies in the seventeenth century ingenuity, fancy, pseudological argument, inventiveness, flagrant sophistry, adroit craftsmanship, facile wordplay, complexity of thought and statement, baroque excess, arcane imagery, strained conceits, mere cleverness, high and low humor, the agile manipulation of standard tropes, the startling discovery of unexpected resemblances between unlike phenomena, the perception of the order and connectedness of the Creation, and truth, sometimes apprehended as through a veil darkly (1995, 1).

It is easy to get lost in an immense variety of the shades of the meaning of wit, therefore, comprehensive knowledge of how the term was understood during the analysed literary period including the shifts of its meaning when deciphering wit in English seventeenth-century literature. It is also worth investigating in order to discern its connotations in particular contexts which might help to understand how a social system of thought had changed.

Dictionaries that give information on the original meaning of *wit* (e.g. *Merriam-Webster*, *Oxford Dictionaries*, *Cambridge Dictionary and Thesaurus, Collins Dictionary*) and comprehensive etymological dictionaries (e.g. *The Concise Dictionary of English Etymology*, *The Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, *The Online Etymology Dictionary*) trace back the lineage of the word *wit* to the Old English verb *witan* which meant "to know, beware of or conscious of, observe, ascertain or learn" from the Proto-Germanic *witan* – "to have seen," hence "to know""[2]. For that reason, the Old English noun *wit* or *gewit* denoted "understanding, intellect, sense, knowledge, consciousness, conscience"[3] or intellectual aptitude in general.

The origins of the term not only shed light on its meaning but also offer clues to its use. Therefore, it is possible to claim that in the past a person who was thought to be witty was respected as a wise man, having superior intellect, a sage or philosopher. At the same time, nobody wanted to be regarded as half-witted, i.e. lacking common sense or, even worse, as witless which was equal to being referred to as a fool or mentally deranged. Hence, wit in its original Old English sense denoted certain identifiable functions of the mind such as the power of reasoning, mental soundness and astuteness of perception. Accordingly, its rudiments reside in the Classical philosophical treatises.

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[2]   *Online Etymological Dictionary* (hereafter ED). Available at:
      http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=wit+
[3]   Ibid.

Early references to *wit* which could be found in the philosophical insights of Aristotle (384-322 BC) indicate that wit was closely related to soul. As a constitutive principle of the living body the soul is the main focus of his treaty *De Anima* composed in 350 BC. In it the philosopher rationalises on the types of soul possessed by different sorts of living beings and distinguishes them by their functions. He defines the soul as "the first actuality of a natural body which has life potentially in it[4]" and names its several operations, i.e. growth, nutrition, movement, reproduction, perception and intellect. Accordingly, Aristotle proposes three types of the soul: the first – a vegetative soul possessed by plants as they are able to grow, nourish and reproduce but they do not have motion, perception or intellect; the second – a sensitive soul bestowing animals that in addition have the function of motion and perception; and the third – a rational soul that is peculiar to humans as it is conscious and intellectual[5]. Human beings are the only possessors of all three types of soul but it is the rational one which separates them from the lower species. Thus, wit stands for the rational part of the soul and though being an integral constituent it is also differed from the organic or sensible components attaining a very important task in separating human beings from fauna.

It should be noted at this point that this merging together of spiritual nature and intellectual endowment expands the terminological scope of *wit* and opens up new perspectives for its comprehension. An English Renaissance scholar and writer Roger Ascham (1515–1568) praises wit which, in his opinion, is of divine nature: "a singular gift of God, and so most rare amongst men" (2010, 103). In the collection of prose quotations *Politeuphuia, Wits Common-Wealth* Nicholas Ling (1570 – 1607) proposes the following definition of *wit* which reflects its close relation with the soul. He explains: "Wit is the first and principal part of the Soul, wherein the mind, the understanding, and the memory are contained, which are most necessary for the direction of all good and virtuous actions" (1669, 41). This definition stresses that wit, which is identical to reason, represents the core of the soul and is an indispensable quality guarding man's moral principles and logical behaviour. In a similar fashion, Lewis associates the meaning of the Anglo-Saxon *gewit* with "mind, reason, intelligence" (1990, 86). In his opinion, it is the first, or, as he puts it, "*old sense*" of wit (ibid., 97). The author points out that wit is a sign of exceptional erudition and supports his idea with an extract from Genesis

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4   ARISTOTLE. *De Anima*. Translated by A. J. Smith. Available at the Internet Classics Archive: http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/soul.2.ii.html
5   Ibid.

maintaining that "rational creatures are those to whom God has given wit", in this way confirming wit's relation to the spiritual domain (ibid., 86).

It is worth noting that, when wit is used in its plural form, it acquires two additional meanings. Hence *wits* embrace five outward and inward senses which were derived from Aristotle's description of outward wits, or senses, i.e. sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch, and five inward senses, or wits, i.e. memory, estimation, imagination, phantasy and common sense[6]. This division of wits is worth considering since "the internal senses, or 'inward wits', were the link between man and the external world on the one hand, and the intellect and spiritual truth on the other" (Woolgar 2006, 19). All that has been stated above leads to the premise that the earliest conceptions of wit were related to sensorial apprehension, spiritual endowment and mental potentiality.

Yet it should be also stressed that wit, which in its own way unites and relates all human beings through its early conceptual framework, also reveals human individuality. Lewis suggests that "men differ from one another not only in the amount of wit or intelligence they have but in the kind" (2013, 88). He expands that "each man's *wit* has its own cast, bent, or temper; one quick and another plodding, one solid and another showy, one ingenious to invent and another accurate to retain" (ibid.). Therefore, such variety of *wits* should be treated as different types of mind, or, as the critic calls them, "mentalities" (ibid.). This particular idea gave rise to further interpretations of wit:

> This sense of *wit* <…> opened the way to nearly all the later developments. Without this sense *wit* is something common to all rational creatures or at least to all men of good sense. But a man's *wit* in this sense is something which can distinguish him, which is characteristic of him; his mental make-up (ibid).

It is possible to state that this is the first shift of its meaning: from wit which is a common feature of all sensible beings to wit that is a distinctive trait of an individual. Wit in the sense of a person's "mental make-up" represents, as Lewis proposes, "*a second sense* of wit", or "*wit-ingenium*" (ibid., 97). He also gives the translation of the Latin word which refers to "a man's intellectual quality" or "cast of mind above the ordinary" (ibid., 89). This is a significant aspect to be considered in relation to this thesis since, according to Lewis, writers in particular stand out for their *ingenium* or "cleverness, ability, high intellectual capacity" (ibid.). Therefore, *second sense* of wit is directly related to invention which is an essential element in a creative process. And this is precisely how writers and literary critics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries understood wit.

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[6]   ARISTOTLE. *De Anima*. Translated by A. J. Smith. Available at the Internet Classics Archive: http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/soul.2.ii.html

In the sixteenth century wit was "a general way to denote liveliness and brilliance of conversation" (Childs, Fowler 2006, 251). This view can be seen Ascham's didactic book *The Scholemaster* (1570) where he elaborates on education and moral intellectual principles that it should cultivate in a person. Wit is certainly one of them. Therefore, Ascham bestows considerable attention to it and distinguishes two kinds of wits, i.e. quick, or light wits and hard, or rough wits.

> Quick wits commonly be apt to take, unapt to keep; soon hot, and desirous of this and that; as cold, and soon weary of the same again; more quick to enter speedily, than able to pierce far; even like over-sharp tools, whose edges be very soon turned.<…> Hard wits be hard to receive, but sure to keep; painful without weariness, heedful without wavering, constant without new-fangleness; bearing heavy things, though not lightly yet willingly; entering hard things, though not easily, yet deeply (Ascham 1570, 98-101).

From the given extract it is clear that he favours hard wits over the quick ones, asserting that the former are steadier and more immersed in their witty bravura; yet, he also states that the latter "prove to be best poets" as their wit is quick and lively (ibid.). This view is supported by Ascham's contemporary John Lyly (1553–1606). His two works of prose *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* (1578) and its sequence *Euphues and His England* (1589) centre on wit in particular. In the didactic romance *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*, the author depicts a life of Euphues, a young Athenian who practices his wit just to enjoy the wickedness rather than the honours of this virtue. In Greek the name 'Euphues' means "well-endowed", i.e. the one possessing intellectual gifts and physical beauty (Loughlin, Bell, Brace 2012, 459). Thus, wit is related to beauty or rather is treated as a substitute for beauty. Such approach to wit marks its aesthetic quality. Another important aspect of wit is that it heavily relies upon intellectual fashions of the time. From this it follows that it can emerge very suddenly but also fade away immediately. Consequently, Lyly's romance and its sequel set a fashion for extreme rhetorical mannerisms that today are known under the name of *euphuism*. Such style was very popular during the second half of the sixteenth century but went out of fashion in the seventeenth century. In her book *Uncommon Tongues: Eloquence and Eccentricity in the English Renaissance* Catherine Nicholson defines euphuism as "the relentless use of parataxis, the heaping of example upon example, the mingling of homespun proverbial wisdom and references to classical lore" (2014, 75). Thus, as a superfluous eloquence euphuistic style brings into play a wide range of figures of speech, for in Lyly's words, "Englishmen desire to hear finer speech than the language will allow, to eat finer bread than is made of wheat, to wear finer cloth than is made of wool"[7].

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[7]   Ibid.

The early seventeenth-century writers and critics envision literary wit as a sign of ingenuity and literary innovation. Abraham Cowley (1618–1667) considers wit as an essential gift of a poet and admires it as a poetic ability to create order out of the disparate elements. He believes that the essential principle of true wit is *concordia discors*, the term coined by Horace, which means "the harmony in discord" (Cuddon 2013, 207). In his poem *Ode to Wit*, Cowley writes wittily about wit:

> *In a true piece of Wit all things must be,*
> *Yet all things there agree,*
> *As in the Ark, join'd without force or strife,*
> *All Creatures dwelt; all creatures that had Life.*[8]

Thus, for the writers of the seventeenth century, wit or *ingenium* is a necessary human faculty to see the relationship between things that are distant from each other in order to work out imaginative, inventive and shocking witty comparisons. Wit is understood as "intellectual keenness and a capacity of 'invention' by which writers could discover surprisingly appropriate figures and conceits, by perceiving resemblances between apparently dissimilar things" (Baldick 2001, 276-277). This is especially evident in the works of the seventeenth-century Metaphysical poets – John Donne (1572–1631), George Herbert (1593–1633), Thomas Carew (1595–1690), Richard Crashaw (1613–1649) and Henry Vaughan (1621–1695). These poets stand out for their ability to blend intellect and imagination to develop "brilliant, surprising, and paradoxical figures of speech" known as wit (Abrams, Harpham 2012, 240). Hence, during this time, wit starts to be regarded as imagination and dexterity of thought since both wit and fancy are united in the act of creation. What is more, in the works of the Metaphysical poets, wit always contains an intellectual element of deliberate ingenuity. This means that literary wit during that time was calculated and cultivated to the highest degree. It was not a traditional way of writing, nor was it transparent and easily decoded. But the pleasure that the readers receive from this kind of wit in large part comes from the difficulty of deciphering its message. Indeed, wit is an integral part of the writer's creative vision.

Hence, wit which originally meant mind, reason or intelligence now turned to signify an imaginative faculty which distinguishes the writer as a master of invention and ingenuity. In the early seventeenth century literary wit was praised as the highest representation of poetic skill. It was defined as the poets'

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[8]   COWLEY, A. *Ode to Wit*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/cowley/ofwit.htm

most appreciated quality. However, this view also resulted in a progressive loss of the distinction between wit and imagination. When wit was regarded as a faculty of imagination, it started to raise some critical questions.

The main issue being discussed during in the middle of the seventeenth century was whether wit, perceived as imagination, involves judgement, or not. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) claims that wit is not just uncontrolled fancy but includes judgement. The philosopher is concerned about the loss of distinction between wit and fancy as it demonstrates the diminishment of rationality in poetry. He discusses the virtues, commonly viewed as intellectual in his *Leviathan* (1651) and states that "judgement without Fancy is Wit, but Fancy without Judgement not"[9]. He considers judgement as the main element of wit. Moreover, he makes a clear distinction between fancy, or imagination which is responsible for seeing resemblances and judgement which discerns the differences.

> Those that observe their similitudes, in case they be such as are but rarely observed by others, are said to have a good wit; by which, in this occasion, is meant a good fancy. But they that observe their differences, and dissimilitudes, which is called distinguishing, and discerning, and judging between thing and thing, in case such discerning be not easy, are said to have a good judgement.[10]

Nevertheless, he maintains that both imagination and judgement constitute wit and proposes perhaps one of the most extensive definitions of wit:

> The contrary hereunto, is that quick ranging of mind, which is joined with curiosity of comparing the things that come into the mind, one with another: in which comparison, a man delighteth himself either with finding unexpected similitude of things, otherwise much unlike, in which men place the excellency of fancy, and from whence proceed those grateful similes, metaphors, and other tropes, by which both poets and orators have it in their power to make things please or displease, and shew well or ill to others, as they like themselves; or else in discerning suddenly dissimilitude in things that otherwise appear the same. And this virtue of the mind is that by which men attain to exact and perfect knowledge; and the pleasure thereof consisteth in continual instruction, and in distinction of places, persons, and seasons, and is commonly termed by the name of judgment: for, to judge is nothing else, but to distinguish or discern: and both fancy and judgment are commonly comprehended under the name of wit, which seemeth to be a tenuity and agility of spirits, contrary to that restiness of the spirits supposed in those that are dull.[11]

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[9]   HOBBES, T. (1651). *Leviathan*. Available at The Online Literature Library: http://literature.org/authors/hobbes-thomas/leviathan/chapter-08.html

[10] HOBBES, T. (1651). *Leviathan*. Available at The Online Literature Library: http://literature.org/authors/hobbes-thomas/leviathan/chapter-08.html

[11] Ibid.

John Locke (1632–1704), on the contrary, separates wit from judgement. When rationalizing about human knowledge in his *Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* (1689) he argues that wit creates comparisons of things that are generally similar and works together with imagination; whereas judgement makes cautious discriminations of various thoughts that are dissimilar and is related to intellect. Therefore, wit is more a decorative attribute to an artist's creative nature, while judgement is a fundamental feature of a creative intellect.

> Wit lying most in the assemblage of ideas, and putting those together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or incongruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy; judgement, on the contrary, lies quite on the other side, in separating carefully, one from the other, ideas, wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by similitude, and by affinity to take one thing for another (Locke 2006, 99).

Nonetheless, the very essence of wit is to combine rather than separate – the analytical mind differentiates and separates out the objects, but, contrariwise, imagination combines them and finds resemblances between objects which are not similar at all. This is done with exceptional swiftness and results in the unexpected. Most certainly, it lays in the ambiguity of the term *wit* itself to combine such contrastive human faculties as reason, imagination and judgement, though it was believed that creation should invoke the synergy of all the above mentioned aspects – intellect, which was required for judging, and vivid imagination for forming new creative ideas. Thus, it could be maintained that in the middle of the seventeenth-century wit became so widespread that it was used as a fashionable subject which was a frequent topic of discussion.

In the beginning of the eighteenth century an essayist, poet and playwright Joseph Addison (1672 – 1719) presented another property of wit, i.e. the element of surprise. In his opinion, wit lies in surprising juxtapositions.

> Every Resemblance of Ideas is not that which we call Wit, unless it be such one that gives Delight and Surprise to the Reader: These two Properties seem essential to Wit, more particularly the last of them. In order therefore that the Resemblance in the Ideas be Wit, it is necessary that the Ideas should not lie too near one another in the Nature of things: for where the Likeness is obvious, it gives no Surprise. (Addison 1998, 190)

When surprise is seen as a key characteristics of wit whether in conversation or literature it becomes clear that "this form of communication is not something most are capable of" (Holcomb 2011, 28) as it requires special skill of the poet.

As a significant attribute of wit surprise is discussed by Sarbievius, in his treatise *De acuto et arguto liber unicus sive Seneca et Martialis*. He believes that the cause of surprise lies in the sharpness of wit. Sarbievius argues that sharp style or language involves in itself discord and accord, in other words, both the *concors discordia* and *discors concordia* [12]. According to him, the essence of a sharp expression is that it combines one idea that is expected by the readers and another one that is unexpected[13]. Thus, what causes surprise in the reader is not particularly the unexpected idea but the combination of the expected and the unexpected; in other words, the harmony which is created from disharmony.

According to Sarbievius, as a characteristics of wit surprise is realised by the reader when he or she experiences it; while sharpness is inherent in the expression and is not dependent on the reader, but rather on the writer[14]. Hence, when the reader experiences surprise for the first time, it is so because such an expression is unexpected, since only then the reader reflects on it for the first time, and the sharpness of the expression captivates him/her as something novel and sudden[15]. Sarbievius claims that, as a rule, surprise is the result of connection or distinction between words or concepts which frustrates the listener's expectations only to satisfy them in an unexpected way. However, William Hazlitt (1778–1830) discusses the notion of wit through comparison and surprise, and by putting wit in opposition to imagination. He explains it as follows: "imagination may be said to be the finding out something similar in things generally alike, or with like feelings attached to them; while wit principally aims at finding out something that seems the same, or amounts to a momentary deception where you least expected it, in things totally opposite" (Hazlitt 1845, 23). Thus, for Hazlitt, wit is an unexpected comparison of things that are totally different to find similarities in dissimilarities invoking a stroke of trickery.

When wit was approached as imagination, it also opened the possibility for evaluation and instigated the third or, to quote Lewis, "dangerous sense" of wit which means that wit became a sharp critical tool (2013, 97). Judith Dundas (1927–2008) whose scientific enquiry focuses on wit in English

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[12] SARBIEVIUS, M. K. *Viena knyga apie aštrų ir šmaikštų stilių, arba Seneka ir Marcialis*. Translated by Ona Daukšienė. Available at: http://www.xn--altiniai-4wb.info/files/literatura/LE00/Ona_Dauk%C5%A1ien%C4%97._ Motiejus_Kazimieras_Sarbievijus.LE2100C.pdf At www.šaltiniai.info.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.

literature compares the terms 'wit' and 'imagination' and their usage in various critical writings in the following way:

> Both 'wit' and 'imagination' entered literary criticism with a more or less objective meaning, in so far as they denoted certain identifiable functions of the mind. But gradually, with their use in literary criticism, these terms became so overlaid with subjective meanings that they not only referred to the creative faculty but also began to connote aesthetic judgments (1964, 224).

Hence, the quality and amount of wit becomes an indicator of what is considered to be serious and intellectual not only between critics and the general public, but also among the writers themselves. The authors of the discussed period were keen to use wit just to be noticed and to achieve a reputation of a witty writer. Wit was used for the sake of wit without any selection:

> I take it that wit in the sense now current means that sort of mental agility or gymnastic which uses language as the principal equipment of its gymnasium. 'Language' must here be taken in a large sense, to include those proverbs, and quotations almost equivalent to proverbs, which are almost ordinary small change of conversation. <…> Pun, half pun, assonance, epigram (in the modern sense) and distorted proverb or quotation are all witty. (Lewis 2013, 97)

Lewis locates this sense of wit in the realm of language. Thus, as Brian D. Holcomb rightly observes, "the wit not only has certain intellectual capabilities, but is also able to communicate those capabilities via language, either speech or writing (2011, 28). However, when the application of the *dangerous sense* of wit becomes a steady practice in language, deciphering between the quality of wit in discourse and "the general calibre of mind inferred from it" becomes quite complicated (ibid., 97-98). David Hume (1711–1776) believes wit being a matter of taste thus adding an additional human faculty: "What wit is, it may not be easy to define; but it is easy surely to determine that it is a quality immediately agreeable to others, and communicating, on its first appearance, a lively joy and satisfaction to everyone who has any comprehension of it"[16]. Thus, it could be stated that the semantic shifts of the conception of wit went a full circle, as Pope warned in *An Essay on Criticism*:

> *Some have at first for Wits, then Poets past,*
> *Turn'd Criticks next, and prov'd plain Fools at last*[17]

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[16] HUME, D. (1751). *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals.* Available at Eighteenth Century Collections Online:
http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/ecco/004806387.0001.000/1:12?rgn=div1;view=fulltext

[17] POPE, A. (1711). *An Essay on Criticism.* Available at The E-Server Poetry Collection: http://poetry.eserver.org/essay-on-criticism.html

These shifts demonstrate not only the changing meaning of wit but also an alternating literary and intellectual climate. Lewis stresses that the literary critics of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries agreed that the true or proper meaning of wit was only in the sense of *ingenium* as "this noble word meant the essential faculty of the poet, the inner cause of excellence in writing" (2013, 104). However, he also notes that "while this lexical agreement still lasted taste began to change. *Wit* was the cause of excellence, but people began to think different things excellent" (ibid.). There was a tendency to discuss what kind of expressions could be regarded as witty or to differentiate between true wit and false wit. False wit, or, in other words, the low forms of wit were usually concerned with play on words or on language in general (e.g. various mechanisms of language such as pronunciation, spelling, double meaning); whereas true wit, or higher forms of it were those which involved a play of ideas. For instance, in his famous publication of *Spectator* (1711) Addison distinguishes the following three types of wit: *false wit*, *mixed wit* and *true wit*:

> False wit includes Anagrams, Chronograms, Lipograms, and Acrosticks: Sometimes of Syllables, as in Echoes and Doggerel Rhymes; Sometimes of Words, as in Punns and Quibbles; and sometimes of whole Sentences or Poems, cast into the Figures of Eggs, Axes, or Altars: Nay some carry the Notion of Wit so far, as to ascribe it even to external Mimickry; and to look upon a Man as an ingenious Person, that can resemble the Tone, Posture, or Face of another. True wit consists in the Resemblance of Ideas rather than resemblance of words and mixed wit is the widespread mingling of the two purer strains.[18]

Hence, wit that invokes the mechanisms of language rather than ideas was seen as lacking judgement and therefore could not be taken as serious. Moreover, wit is no longer considered a faculty of the writer's mind but rather a literary product. It becomes clear that the critics and poets of the eighteenth century perceived wit in different ways in comparison with the seventeenth-century authors who made no distinction between literary wit and imagination, they did not separate it from mere rhetorical figures. They assimilated it with perception and ingenious expression of unexpected resemblances.

Addison's focus on surprise as one of the key features of literary wit suggests that it rises from incongruity which is a very different view from the seventeenth century when it was treated as harmony that is by paradox found in discord. By constructing his ironical inversion of this idea, the eighteenth-

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[18] ADDISON, J. *The Spectator*. Volumes 1, 2 and 3. Available at The Project Gutenberg: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12030/12030-h/12030-h/SV1/Spectator1.html

century poet, essayist and critic Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) describes wit of the earlier Metaphysical poets as "a kind of *discordia concors*, a combination of dissimilar images or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike" (1868, 52). Contrary to the critics of the earlier centuries who considered wit as dexterity of thought, invention and harmony, Johnson is of the opinion that wit consists of "the most heterogeneous ideas" that were "yoked by violence together" and found them distasteful (ibid.).

In the eighteenth century wit was seen as a set of decorative elements worked out in writing which were often excessive and regarded as arrogant and therefore resisted by the literary critics. Another alteration which wit confronted is related with fondness for imagination: "Romanticism with its cult of imagination and genius tended to relegate wit, along with fancy and ingenuity, to an inferior position, transferring its older positive senses to the imaginative faculty" (Baldick 2001, 276). Wit was viewed as a product of an imaginative rather than intellectual faculty. It is worth adding here that during this period and in the nineteenth century wit acquired a new shade of meaning, i.e. frivolity. This was a sign of the last shift of the meaning of the term *wit*, i.e. its turn towards humorous expression. In *The Book of Literary Terms* Lewis Turco describes it as follows:

> Many poets and critics in the nineteenth century, including Wordsworth and Coleridge, attempted to make distinctions between various related terms, including *imagination*, *fancy*, and *wit*. <...> Wit was the ability to imagine or perceive incongruous connections between disparate things, as in the *pun* or *bon mot*; it was the expression of the quick and humorously clever mind, but it was essentially superficial. (1999, 157)

In the late eighteenth century wit was viewed as "superficial cleverness" (Quinn 2006, 443). Such an attitude passed into the nineteenth century. Ultimately, wit was regarded as inconsistent with serious writings and therefore was associated more with an amusing sphere of creativity. Wit was considered as a subset of humour and this view has been retained to this day. Now a person who is called a wit attains a specific connotation since "the most common vernacular use of 'wit' is to refer to someone who is learned and humorous, and perhaps possesses a large stock-pile of anecdotes, epigrams and other tit-bits" (Auger 2010, 336). However, the seventeenth-century treatments of wit focused less on humorous effects. Rather, they considered its intellectual and linguistic properties.[19]

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[19] SINGH, R. K (2010). *Wit as a Tool of Poetic Communication*. Available at: http://professorevans.info/wit-as-a-tool-of-poetic-communication

Literary wit regained its popularity with modern critics and the readers in the twentieth century when T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) attempted to restore the original value of wit. When revaluating the strides of the Metaphysical poets, he referred to wit as "a tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace" (Eliot 2014, 252) that is able to unite some things as well as separate them. The critic admires the wit of the Metaphysical poets as the capacity of their creative mind to discover incredible poetic comparisons in things or ideas that are apparently unlike and this way surprise or even shock the readers.

Taking into consideration all that has been stated above it is possible to claim that wit is a broad and flexible term. It encompasses intellect, invention, imagination, judgement. Summarising all the shifts in the meaning of *wit* it could be claimed that it was regarded in the Classical period as a rational soul and as a matter pertaining to rhetoric; later it referred to common sense and a sign of sanity. In the Renaissance it was perceived as wisdom or intelligence; the writers of the seventeenth century admired wit as a sign of talent or even genius in ability to use language in most elaborate ways, hence wit was a sign of ingenuity. However, in the eighteenth century it was associated with fancy and imaginative possibilities that could be applied to language. During this period wit lost its prominence in literary and critical sphere since it was regarded as a decorative, arrogant way of writing which was ambiguous and not up to the standards of clear and intellectual writing. Later the meaning of the term 'wit' got narrowed to the degree that, to put it in Lewis' wording, it almost became "semantically null" (2013, 86). In the nineteenth century wit was identified as a subset of humour and a tool making the audience laugh.

It is important to note that this last shift in the conception of wit caused several negative reactions to wit. It was regarded not as intellectual matter, but rather as something to laugh at; accordingly, as something that is trivial and not serious, therefore, not desirable in an intelligent conversation and serious writing and not deserving to be critically examined. At present, two main approaches to wit could be discerned: the one that regards wit in a narrow sense and links it to specific, exceptional intellectual abilities of the writer as well as ingenuity of thought and expression; and the second one which perceives literary wit in a broader sense, i.e. as a form of humour or ability to produce amusing remarks. Nevertheless, wit has several qualities that distinguish it from plain humour or comic; therefore, a brief comment on them as well as other antonymous and synonymous terms will help to clarify their similarities and differences and reveal the multifariousness of the term.

1.2. Definition of wit by analogy and contrast

The attempts to distinguish the most appropriate term for *wit* lead to exploration of literary wit in relation to other analogue terms that were, and some of them still are, being used instead of or interchangeably with a term of *wit*. For instance, *bel esprit* which is a term that was introduced by an eminent French critic Dominique Bouhours (1628–1702) in his *Entretiens d'Artiste et d'Eugène* (1671). This book contains an essay entitled *Le Bel Esprit* where the author calls wit *bel esprit* or beautiful spirit and describes it as 'le bon sens qui brille'[20] (i.e. good sense that sparkles). This definition was much quoted in English literary scene, especially by Dryden who translated some of the Bouhours's works into English. The term encompasses a mode of social interaction that had far-reaching implications for European culture. Its sparkling quality is also not accidental but of markedly intellectual character:

> This balances temperament of vivacity and good sense means that espirit is subtle, but not frivolous; that it sparkles, but not too much; that it is quick in comprehension and that its judgements are sound. When one has such espirit, one thinks things well, and expresses things just as well as one thinks them. One puts much sense into few words, says all that needs to be said, and says precisely that which needs to be said.[21]

Thus, the term represents intellectual competence which is represented by brief and compact yet very befitting words and it closely resembles the English term *wit* which also concerns speed and agility.

Another term in relation to wit is given by Michelson. The scholar is of the opinion that "if a term were to be adopted [to replace a term 'wit'], a likely candidate is *jouissance*, which made its first consequential appearance, with regard to literary analysis, in the work of Roland Barthes and which has also been negotiated by Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan, M. H. Abrams, and many others" (Michelson 2000, 3). Nevertheless, even *jouissance*, while being discussed by several critics, acquires a different signification that is worth addressing. In his book *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), Roland Barthes explores the term *jouissance* through the reader's relation to language, or, to be more precise, through the act of reading. He distinguishes two systems of reading:

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[20] BOUHOURS, D. *Entretiens d'Artiste et d'Eugène*. Available at Gallica The BnF Digital library:
http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k122907n/f205.item.r=le%20bon%20sens%20qui%20brille

[21] Ibid.

> One goes straight to the articulations of the anecdote, it considers the extent of the text, ignores the play of language <...>; the other reading skips nothing; it weighs, it sticks to the text, it reads, so to speak, with application and transport, grasps at every point in the text the asyndeton which cuts the various languages—and not the anecdote: it is not (logical) extension that captivates it, the winnowing out of truths, but the layering of significance (1975, 12).

It is the latter type of reading, where the reader is engaged with the text by making an active effort in retracing all the literary movements, that results in the experience of *jouissance* or *bliss*. Barthes introduces the term *the text of bliss* witch is "the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language" (ibid., 14). This, relates to literary wit a lot since its interpretation is induced by a sudden stop when the interpretation of a text does not give adequate results in relation to the overall context. It could be stated that the reader experiences a state of a loss as he/she has to construct another interpretation or, in other words, find another more suitable code to decipher a witty expression. The more complex wit is the greater efforts it requires and it might cause the reader to feel discomfort, since, in a way, the reader assesses his/her own mental capability depending on how long it takes him/her to decode the meaning of literary wit. Moreover, the result might be quite unexpected (after all, wit aims to surprise), thus, it frequently overturns the reader's convictions or shatters his/her beliefs. However, it is necessary for the reader/interpreter to reach that state of a complete loss or, as Barthes suggests, "crisis in his relation with language", in order to rethink and rediscover the true sense of wit. It is precisely this new discovery or decoding of wit that awards him/her with a feeling of intellectual bliss.

Julia Kristeva, in her turn, discusses the term *jouissance* from the point of view of gender differences. She uses Jacques Lacan's concepts of masculine jouissance and feminine jouissance and adopts them in her book *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974) where she relates jouissance specifically to a female body and perceives art as "the flow of *jouissance* into language" (Kristeva 1984, 79). Though these two approaches towards *juissance* are different they are nevertheless in one way or another related with wit as a vehicle of language. However, not all notions that are used as substitutes of wit have similar inherent characteristics or nature. Therefore, several points need to be discussed in order to address the terminological confusion created by the abundance of similar and sometimes interconnecting terms as the comic, the ludicrous, humour, joke, laughter and of course wit. Even though

some authors, who use more than one of these terms in their scientific works, attempt to make a distinction between them, there is still no terminological agreement of how to treat these seemingly similar notions. Thus, it might be useful to examine the aforementioned terms more closely in their relation to wit in particular.

To begin with, the classification of the broader categories (i.e. the ludicrous and the comic) will be explored. In his book *Studies in Religion and Literature*[22] (1904) William Samuel Lilly devotes an entire chapter to discuss the theory of the ludicrous where he enumerates twenty one kinds of the ludicrous: humour, wit, irony, satire, sarcasm, parody, bulls, puns, banter, caricature, buffoonery, mimicry, the comical, the farcical, the burlesque, the grotesque, alliteration, conundrums, charades and practical joking. The author asserts that this catalogue is far from exhaustive, however, he does not elaborate on most of the kinds (wit among them) since, in his opinion, they "seem so plain and intelligible as to require no discussion"[23]. The key problem with this categorisation is that the author does not explain his criteria for distinguishing wit as a kind of the ludicrous, nor does he describe any features of wit that would clarify his categorisation.

Other authors tend to distinguish wit as a part of the comic. Wolfgang Schmidt-Hidding (1963, 37-160), for instance, defines four basic realms of the meaning of the comic: humour which is a loving attitude, fun which refers to the power of energy and vitality, ridicule or mock which are concerned with the basic feeling of hatred, and wit which stands for the power of the mind. Though this author considers wit as a part of the comic, it is still differentiated from the rest by its intellectual quality as it denotes the intellectual potential. In a similar fashion Willbald Ruch (2007) designates eight different styles of the comic, i.e. humour, wit, irony, satire, fun, nonsense, sarcasm, ridicule; and explains their differences. The scholar states that mock or ridicule is based on "haughtiness/maliciousness", fun relies on "vitality/high spirits", humour pertains to "a sympathetic heart", whereas, wit is linked to "a superior spirit" (2007, 6). Taking into account the ideas of these two scholars it is possible to make an observation that wit mainly designates sharp and superior intellect. Ruch focuses more on the perception of humour and not wit, nevertheless he makes an observation that "sense of humour is carefully distinguished from sense of fun, sense of wit, sense of ridicule, sense of comic, or others. <...> The understanding of humour is in opposition to the understanding of wit,

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[22] LILLY, W. S. (1904). *Studies in Religion and Literature*. Available at: https://archive.org/details/studiesinreligio00lillrich/page/n6
[23] Ibid.

satire, ridicule, and not an umbrella term for all kinds of the funny" (2007, 681). Hence, it follows that though wit is perceived as being a part of the comic together with humour, is not the same as humour.

When it comes to the interconnection of wit and humour two main approaches can be observed – one, that considers wit as a subset of humour, and the other one, which separates it from humour. As it was already pointed out in the previous subchapter, the definition of wit has changed a great deal in the mists of time. The discussion of wit from the diachronic perspective has revealed that wit is a complex term those sense was shifting, transforming and acquiring positive as well as negative connotations. At the same ime, the evolution of wit's definition expressed the changing attitudes in the society to what is most valuable, desirable and trendy. This concerns changes in the intellectual domain as well, perhaps that is the reason why currently wit is perceived as a subset of humour. Consider several definitions of wit proposed by the contemporary literary dictionaries: *A Dictionary of Literary and Thematic Terms* states that wit is currently understood as "the ability to express an insight in an ingenious and amusing manner" (Quinn 2006, 443), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* also relates wit with "amusing verbal cleverness" and claims that "the usual modern sense of wit, <...> is one of light cleverness and skill", however, this dictionary also admits that "earlier uses of the term included the positive sense of imaginative capacity, which has since become rather detached from the weaker modern notion of what is witty" (Baldick 2001, 276-277). Though these two dictionaries depict wit as ingenious and clever, they still diminish it by claiming that it possesses amusing manner and that its cleverness and skill is light.

Similarly, in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Abrams notes that "at present both "wit" and "humor" designate species of the comic: any element in a work of literature, whether a character, event, or utterance, which is designed to amuse or to excite mirth in the reader or audience" (1999, 329). The author also states that "the words "wit" and "humor," however, had a variety of meanings in earlier literary criticism" without further elaborating on them (ibid.). *The Anthem Dictionary of Literary Terms and Theory* claims that at present "the most common vernacular use of 'wit' is to refer to someone who is learned and humorous, and perhaps possesses a large stock-pile of anecdotes, epigrams and other amusing tit-bits" (Auger 2010, 336). Thus, it becomes clear that most of the modern dictionaries either do not separate wit from humour refusing to treat them as individual terms or consider wit as humour or the comic and, therefore, an utterance which aims to amuse the

readers. And though several dictionaries do mention the shift in meaning which wit has undergone during the centuries, they fail to distinguish how the notion of wit differs from the notions of humour rather providing rather limited descriptions about the distinctness of these two terms.

One of the leading researches in the field of humour Salvatore Attardo (1994, 7) addresses the complexity involved in the attempts to distinguish between humour and its semantically relating terms illustrating it by the following schema:

WIT

pun   bon mot

Satire   Irony   nonsense

comic

RIDICULE   **HUMOUR**

Mock   joke   whim

Sarcasm

tease

practical joke

FUN
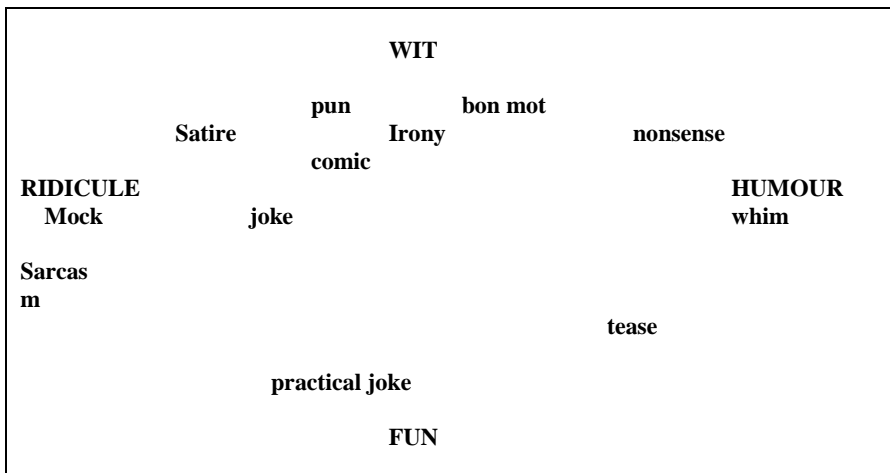
Figure 1. *The Semantic Field of Humour*

According to the scholar wit should be understood as belonging to the set of sixteen notions referring by their meaning to humour. However, Rupert D. V. Glasgow proposes quite the opposite view regarding the semantic field of wit:

> Etymologically, the word "wit" has its origins in the semantic field of knowledge (and ultimately vision), as is shown by its German cousin "Witz," which is descended from the Old High German wizzi, an overall designation for natural and acquired knowledge in general. <…> The English had in fact initially imported the word "wit" in the second half of the sixteenth century to translate the Latin ingenium, a word stemming from gignere (to beget, produce) and responsible for such terms as genius and engineer (1995, 100).

Indeed, wit and humour are frequently used as synonymous terms, but the application of the two terms and attempts which have been made to differentiate between them suggest that there should be a principal disparity. One difference between wit and humour could be noticed from the very origins of the terms. The term *humour* derives from the Latin *humor* which originally meant 'moisture' and was used to denote the four major fluids of the body – blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. It was believed that "the

admixture or commingling of these determined a person's mental disposition, character, mind, morality and temperament" (Cuddon 2013, 343). The evidence of humour having this sense could be observed in the titles of Ben Jonson's famous plays *Every Man in his Humour* (1598) and *Every Man out of his Humour* (1600). As the titles suggest all the characters in the play are based precisely on the above mentioned humour physiology.

Wit, on the contrary, as it has already been stressed in the previous subchapter, originally signified mental capacity as it is derived from the Old English word *gewit* meaning understanding, intellect, sense wisdom, talent and even genius[24]. To quote Daniel Wickberg, "humour originally signified the natural physical makeup of persons, and wit the intellectual faculty by which man was separated from nature" (2015, 60). Therefore, humour was related with mood and emotion; whereas wit was associated with reason and ability to take control over senses, wisdom.

The first attempts at distinguishing between the concepts of wit and humour appeared in the classical rhetorical treaties. Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC – 43 BC) proclaimed the idea "that all is not witty that is laughable"[25]. In his treatise *De Oratore* (55 BC) the philosopher explains that wordplay as a form of wit is worthy to be admired as it does not seek to produce laughter, but is a sign of extensive expertise: "The play upon equivocal words is particularly clever, and depends on language, not on facts; but it seldom raises any considerable laughter, being chiefly praised as evidence of elegant scholarship"[26]. Wit may arouse wonder, perplexed astonishment but not laughter as "the power to divert the force of a word into a sense quite different from that in which other folk understand it, seems to indicate a man of talent"[27].

Another rhetorician Marcus Fabius Quintilianus (c. 35 – c. 100 CE) who was widely referred to in the Renaissance writings also discussed the differences between wit and humour. His twelve-volume treatise focusing on the theory and practice of the rhetoric *Institutio Oratoria* which was published

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[24] ED. Available at:
http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=wit&allowed_in_frame=0 and CUDDON, J. A. (2013). *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*.

[25] CICERO. *De Oratore.* Available at: The LOEB classical library:
https://archive.org/stream/cicerodeoratore01ciceuoft/cicerodeoratore01ciceuoft_djvu.txt

[26] Ibid.

[27] CICERO. *De Oratore.* Available at: The LOEB classical library:
https://archive.org/stream/cicerodeoratore01ciceuoft/cicerodeoratore01ciceuoft_djvu.txt

around 95 CE illuminates the significance of education for orators and provides advices on how to develop the skills required for well-grounded rhetorical speeches. In Book VI, Chapter 3, the rhetorician discusses the distinctness of wit and states that there are various names by which wit can be described; but it is beneficial to consider them separately in order to perceive their specific meanings. Quintilian believes that humour has a two-fold nature: "a saying adapted to excite laughter is generally based on false reasoning and has always something low in it. It is often purposely sunk into buffoonery", meanwhile wit, on the contrary, can be distinguished as an element of eloquence which is an urban construct: it is a "language with a smack of the city in its words, accent and idiom"; witty expression also displays erudition or "a certain tincture of learning derived from associating with well-educated men", it is often sophisticated and therefore is "the opposite of rusticity"[28].

It should be noted that very similar notions were articulated in famous Aristotle's treatise *On Rhetoric* which dates back to the 4th century BC. In Book III, Chapter 10, the philosopher discusses the use of *asteia* and explains that "astu means "town," usually in the physical rather than the political sense, the latter being polis. In contrast to the country, towns often cultivate some degree of sophistication; thus, asteia, "things of the town," came to mean good taste, wit, and elegant speech" (2007, 218). The term *asteia* is analogous to the Latin term *urbanitas* (from urbs meaning "city") which could be found in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* where he specifies four types of wit: *urbanitas* which is an urbane or learned wit; *venustus,* a graceful or charming wit; *facetiae* or polished and gentle wit and *salsus* which is salty or sharp wit[29]. Quintilian also distinguishes such features of wit as grace, charm and expresses his observations by comparing wit with salt.

> When, therefore, we speak of the salt of wit, we refer to wit about which there is nothing insipid, wit, that is to say, which serves as a simple seasoning of language, a condiment which is silently appreciated by our judgment, as food is appreciated by the palate, with the result that it stimulates our taste and saves a speech from becoming tedious. But just as salt, if sprinkled freely over food, gives a special relish of its own, so long as it is not used to excess, so in the case of those who have the salt of wit there is something about their language which arouses in us a thirst to hear[30].

It seems that Italians exhibited quite different intellectual taste which is evident in this line from Tesauro who states that "there is no river of eloquence

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28 QUINTILIAN. *Institutio Oratoria*. Available at:
   http://eserver.org/rhetoric/quintilian/6/chapter3.html#17
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.

so sweet by itself that it would seem to us anything but bland and unpleasant without wit's sweetener" (1995, 461). Also, much later, in 1818 William Hazlitt (1778–1830) reworked Quintilian's idea in order to reproach and express his criticism towards an over abundant employment of wit. In his lecture *On Wit and Humour*, the author warned other writers to apply wit in moderation as "wit is the salt of conversation, not the food" (2004, 50). Hence an observation could be made that thoughtful and creative use of wit enriches an eloquent discourse, while its excessive application will result in a boastful, unoriginal and tasteless text.

Thus, it appears that wit was taken seriously since it possessed the power to exalt or diminish the writers. Therefore, they had to be cautions where to and how often insert a wit ingredient and for what purpose. To quote Kathleen Kulper who discusses the differences between humour, folly and wit, "folly is laughable in itself" but wit "implies both a mental agility and a linguistic grace that is very much a product of conscious art" (2012, 179). The critic stresses the intellectual and aesthetic qualities of wit and adds another difference – humour is more natural and accidental, while the application of wit is rational, calculated and deliberate (ibid.). Humour is a product of nature just as wit is a product of art which was highlighted by Hazlitt in *On Wit and Humour*. The author asserts that "humour is describing the ludicrous as it is in itself; wit is the exposing it, by comparing or contrasting it with something else. Humour is, as it were, the growth of nature and accident; wit is the product of art and fancy" (Hazlitt 1845, 13).

Scholarly debates on the nature of humour and wit are prominent not only in literary but also psychological studies. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) devoted a book to the psychology of wit. It was first published in 1905 under the title *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious* often translated into English as *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*[31] making jokes rather than wit the major object under investigation which exposes the troublesome terminological perplexity. Nevertheless, Freudian theories on humour and wit provide more evidence on their divergent character. Freud claims that "wit is made, while the comical is found" (2014, 289). Hence, wit is a matter of creative invention, whereas humour might be found in the characters, seen in the objects or situations. Similarly, Ellie Aubouin explains that "we sense humor, we can bring it out, cultivate it, reconstitute it, we do not invent it: it

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[31] The original title in German is *Der Witz und seine Beziehungzum Unbewußten*. Though, Billig claims that "there are differences between the ways that wit and *Witz* are used in their respective languages. 'Wit' is more specific than *Witz*, for it carries an implication that the humour is of good quality" (2005, 149).

is inherent in situations and in facts. Wit, on the other hand, is a creation of intelligence, and its ideas and words are the substance from which this creation is made. We therefore have 'the gift of wit' (1948, 74). Gerald Massey differentiates this particular quality, but he also expresses the thought that these terms share different social class bound connotations: "wit is more artificial and a thing of culture; humour lies near to nature"[32]. By this the author means that wit is ascribed to higher social class and men of culture; while humour belongs to uneducated lower class audiences. Russian literary critic Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895–1975) claims that Early Christianity had even condemned laughter as they associated it with workings from the devil (1984, 73). Moreover, the author claims that laughter was perceived negatively during specific historical periods. Bakhtin deliberates on this matter in the following way:

> Laughter in the Middle Ages remained outside all official spheres of ideology and outside all official strict forms of social relations. Laughter was eliminated from religious cult, from feudal and state ceremonials, etiquette, and from all the genres of high speculation. An intolerant, one-sided tone of seriousness is characteristic of official medieval culture. The very contents of medieval ideology-asceticism, somber providentialism, sin, atonement, suffering, as well as the character of the feudal regime, with its oppression and intimidation-all these elements determined this tone of icy petrified seriousness. It was supposedly the only tone fit to express the true, the good, and all that was essential and meaningful. Fear, religious awe, humility, these were the overtones of this seriousness (ibid.).

Humour and especially laughter were regarded as impolite and inappropriate behaviour, thus it is understandable why they became associated with the middle or low class society, while sophistication and reason were seen as the properties required for witty discourse and developed by the educated elite. Frank Muir claims that in the eighteenth century wit was the single aspect of comedy that could be practiced in public as "polite society would not tolerate the sight of gentlemen roaring with laughter" (1900, xxvii). This idea is also discussed by Frank E. Burdett who states that wit was deeply associated with the upper class till the nineteenth century.

> Wit was not to be laughed at. It was only to be admired with a smirk, or a nod of appreciation. It was thought that a "load laugh bespoke a vacant mind". The educated were full of reason and never resorted to laughter. Wit continued to be the sport of aristocrat all the way into the Eighteenth century (Burdett 2014, 179).

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[32] MASSEY, G. (1860). *American Humour*. Available at: http://gerald-massey.org.uk/massey/cpr_american_humour.htm

Thus, wit was linked to the upper classes who employed it in the conversation or writing to release their constrained emotions or opinions, yet not crossing the line and matching the expectations imposed by their class and culture in general. Daniel Wickberg also believes that "wit was associated with aristocracy, with the values of a 'well-bred' elite; humor, on the other hand, was essentially a bourgeois term, one in which naturalness, benevolence and universality were primary elements" (2015, 59).

Moreover, humour was often seen as dubious or having ambiguous character, while wit as a matter of certainty: "humour may be dry – may consist of subtle innuendos of a somewhat uncertain character not devoid of pleasantry" while "wit is sharply defined like a crystal"[33]. Thus, it can be stated that "wit is of the known and definite; humour is of the unknown and indefinable"[34]. If the language of humour is "dry", the discourse of wit is refined and polished. And though humour can be broad, wit is distinguished as sharp because one needs to be especially sagacious to generate language impregnated with acute intellectual force.

During the seventeenth century and up till the middle of the eighteenth century wit was considered "the highest example of poetic skill" (Quinn 2006, 443). It is treated as a quality of high importance and considered as one of the criteria for the critical evaluation of creative endeavour. In *An Evening's Love* (1671) John Dryden appraises the works of Ben Jonson, William Shakespeare and John Fletcher by the virtue of their excelling respectively in humour and in wit. According to him, Johnson has a talent "to make men appear pleasantly ridiculous on stage", but Shakespeare and Fletcher use wit which is "the sharpness of conceit" that is seen in their repartee (Dryden 1808, 223). Wit is entirely dependent upon apt phrasing, whereas humour evolves from particular situations and incidents and it does not rely exclusively on the sharpness of expression. There arises another difference – wit often exposes the quality of thought, while humour deals with character, situation and action:

> Wit deals more with thoughts, and Humour with outward things. Wit only reaches characteristics, and therefore it finds more food in a later time and more complex state of society. Humour deals with character. The more robust and striking the character, the better for humour: hence the earlier times, being more fruitful in peculiar character, are most fruitful in humour[35].

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[33] L'ESTRANGE, A. G. K. (2006). *History of English Humour, Vol. 1*. Available at Project Gutenberg: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/18300

[34] Ibid.

[35] MASSEY, G. (1860). *American Humour*. Available at: http://gerald-massey.org.uk/massey/cpr_american_humour.htm

Thus, wit is language-based and humour is event-based. This difference was noted very early by Cicero who established the distinction between language-based (*de dicto*) and event-based (*de re*) humour and asserted that event-based humour is comic and, therefore, it is not a prerogative of wit[36]. Wit, in its turn, is an intellectual display of cleverness. It is marked by quickness of verbal perfection, while humour is a less obvious mental construct. Wit is always verbal; though it might be recorded in writing, it still denotes the impromptu speech. However, humour does not entirely rely on language as it might be wordless. L'Estrange explains this in the following way:

> As wit must be always intellectual it must be in words, and hence as well as because it must imply impromptu talent, the comic situations of a farce or pantomime are not witty. <...> In the same way a conversation between foolish men on the stage may be amusing, but cannot be witty. Wit may be recorded in writing, it generally implies impromptu speech whereas humour rises from a very situation and is connected to the character[37].

This idea resembles the disparity between wit and humour that first appeared in the theories of dramatic comedy. Humour was associated with comedy and, therefore, based on character and situation, while wit related to comedy that was based on an intellectual utterance. Billig argues that "wit involved playing with ideas or words, whereas humour occurred when the object of the laughter was a person" (2005, 61). Hence, wit demonstrates the author's sophisticated manoeuvring with language and is viewed as an intellectual evocation and as such detached from the sphere of humour. "Nothing that smells of the lamp, or refers much to particular experience, or second-hand information, deserves the name of wit"[38] proclaimed L'Estrange. This is precisely what was maintained by T.S. Eliot who defended the Metaphysical poets by stating that their style was both witty and serious (2014, 191). It was an important point to be highlighted since in the nineteenth century the understanding of 'wit' started to change towards a humorous quality. Moreover, "wit became a more commonly-traded commodity, no longer confined to the aristocracy" (Holcomb 2011, 22). As noted by Lewis Turco, in the nineteenth century, "wit was the ability to imagine or perceive incongruous connections between disparate things, <...> but it was essentially

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[36]   CICERO. *De Oratore.* Available at the LOEB classical library:
       https://archive.org/stream/cicerodeoratore01ciceuoft/cicerodeoratore01ciceuoft_
       djvu.txt
[37]   L'ESTRANGE, A. G. K. (2006). *History of English Humour, Vol. 1*. Available
       at Project Gutenberg: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/18300
[38]   Ibid.

superficial" (Turco 1999, 157). However, this statement is quite ambiguous since as a rule calling someone witty does not imply that he or she is superficial, but on the contrary, it is regarded as a high compliment to the interlocutor's mental capacity; whereas calling somebody humorous equals treating him/her as funny or ridiculous, eager to make others laugh, thus it implies the comicality.

L'Estrange compares wit and humour in the following way: "wit is the unexpected exhibition of some clearly defined contrast or disproportion; humour is the unexpected indication of a vague discordance, in which the sense or the perception of ignorance is prominent"[39]. He, therefore, concludes that "wit is the comedy of knowledge, humour of ignorance"[40]. It might seem that superior intelligence is the core or wit; however, it can be used for various purposes and evoke negative connotations. Consider Rod A. Martin's explanation:

> Over time, wit took on the meaning of the old word ridicule, referring to aggressive cleverness and wordplay, whereas humor emphasized sympathy and benevolence, and was seen as a more positive and desirable basis for laughter. Wit was intellectual, sarcastic, and related to antipathy, whereas humor was emotional, congenial, and related to "fellow-feeling". (2010, 24)

In fact, these qualities of wit were noticed very early by Aristotle who claimed in his treatise *On Rhetoric* (Book II, Chapter 12) that "wit is educated insolence" (2007, 151). For him ethically humour and wit represented two different categories. Wit was used as a means for disclosing flaws and morally wrong behaviour but at the same time it was understood as criticizing people in a malignant and hostile way. Contrariwise, humour, was seen as a benign attempt to belong to a certain community, laughing heartily together with people without disgracing or putting anyone down.

In the book *A Mania for Magnificence* (1972) Louis Kronenberger compares wit and humour in similar way:

> Where wit is a form of criticism or mockery, humor includes an element of self-criticism or self-mockery; where wit tends to proclaim imperfection, humor wryly acknowledges it; where wit undresses you, humor goes naked. At its best, humor simultaneously hurts and heals, makes one larger from a willingness to make oneself less. (1972, 11)

This description of wit alludes to the psychological realm thus bringing us back to Freud. In *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious* Freud traces back the techniques and tendencies of wit. He delineates some parallels between

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[39] L'ESTRANGE, A. G. K. (2006). *History of English Humour, Vol. 1*. Available at Project Gutenberg: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/18300
[40] Ibid.

wit, dreams and the unconscious. The author distinguishes two main kinds of wit: *harmless wit* and *tendency wit* (Freud 2014, 138). However, he also emphasizes that it is not the mentioned division that makes wit any shallower or less worthy but its content. It is best reflected in *tendency wit* possessing hostile or obscene witty utterances. Such wit is also called *hostile* since, according to Freud, it expresses aggression, satire or defence (ibid.) One more form of wit is *obscene wit* which serves as a form of sexual exhibition and even invokes invectives (ibid). Thus, wit or witticism, as Freud also calls them, might be sceptical, critical or even cynical, but at the same time they might be used as a means to resist the authority or escape from its pressure. In a way, witticisms are all successful escapes from political or class oppression.

Sir Harold Nicolson (1886–1968) describes the differences of wit and humour in a similar way in his essay *The English Sense of Humour* (1968, 18):

> The essential difference between humour and wit is that, whereas wit is always intentional, humour is always unintentional. Wit possesses an object; it is critical, aggressive and often cruel; it depends for its success upon condensation, revelation, suddenness and surprise, and it necessitates a quick and deliberate motion of the mind; it is not a private indulgence but invariantly needs an audience, it is thus a social phenomenon. Humour on the other hand has no object; it does not seek to wound others, it seeks only to protect the self; it is not a sword but a shield. So far from entailing an expenditure of intellect of psychic effort, it seeks to economise that effort; it does not depend upon suddenness or surprise, but is contemplative, conciliatory, ruminating; and it is largely a private indulgence and does not require an audience for its enjoyment.

Freud is of the opinion that through witty expressions the "economized energy" is released (ibid., 230). J. C. Gregory disagrees and comments on it addressing the difference between wit and humour in the following way: "if "economized" energy means energy applied to securing comic or humorous effect when it is not required for its original purpose, wit has been forcibly fitted into the common formula" (2014, 195). Although wit might be treated as harsh, aggressive and hostile, and its psychological character is sometimes questionable one thing remains undoubted, and that is its intellectuality.

Moreover, double-facedness is another feature peculiar to wit. As noted by Errett, "wit can be used to cruel ends, but it can just as easily be comprised of Compassion. The two are sides of a coin" (2014, 12-13). Indeed, contrary to humour, wit plays a significant role in romance. It is known for being invoked to impress or even seduce the beloved person. Besides, wit was often employed as a tool to promote oneself and advance socially. However, just as it can be applied to praise someone, in the same way it can be invoked to disgrace or humiliate an interlocutor. Hence, wit creates a ground for

expressing one's opinion freely without any limitations of gender, social status norms. However, because of its multifaceted nature, wit can also turn against its producer since wit is "perhaps the only weapon with which it is possible to stab oneself in one's back" (Bocca 1954, 172). It can become a dangerous weapon in the hands of an inexperienced artist or conversationalist which also confirms that wit is very different from humour and must be taken seriously in order to cap someone's line instead of showcasing one's own inability to respond on time and accordingly.

Some other differences between humour and wit could be delineated while analysing the process of their production. In the article *The Soul of Wit: A Relevance Theoretical Discussion* (2011) Anne Furlong focuses on the process by which witty effects are produced in the reader. The author disputes the idea that wit is a subset of humorous discourse and tries to confirm her point by analysing the stages of humorous event. The author relies on the three phases of humorous event as described by Apte who claims that firstly, the stimulus or trigger mechanism is offered; secondly, the reader's mind attempts to make sense of the given stimulus; finally, the humorous event is completed through the addressee's laughter or smile (Apte 1992, 35). Furlong admits that wit covers to the first two stages, but argues about the third one: "while it may produce pleasure or cause laughter, wit is not coextensive with humour, though they have much in common" and adds that "early treatments of wit tended to focus less on its humorous effects and much more on its intellectual and linguistic properties" (2011, 137). Thus, the process through which the reader of the witty discourse has to go through is not so much emotional, but cognitive. In other words, the reader/interpreter has to analyse the operation of a complex intellectual mechanism in order to decipher a witty passage. This process is purely intellectual as it involves stimuli, perception, and judgement. Therefore, this activity is thought of as intellectually engaging, but not laughter orientated. In other words, there is more "heart" in humour and more "head" in wit. If nevertheless this response would be perceived as evoking laughter, then Meredith's term *intellectual laughter* might be applied. By it the author claims that there is a difference between an ordinary laughter and a thoughtful one: the recipient "laughs through the mind, for the mind directs it" (1998, 140). Thus, if regular humour creates a smile which is an involuntary movement of face muscles, especially lips, together with a peculiar expression of the eyes which attests amusement on the face of the reader, wit works out a smile in the mind – a smile of surprise and wonder.

Genealogical research of the term also calls wit as the precursor and wellspring of the terms that followed. Ermida brings forward the idea that

"humour appeared lexically after wit did, it absorbed part of the latter's legacy, and coloured it in a special shade, joy" (2008, 10). This was earlier allegorically described by Joseph Addison in his article *Genealogy of Humor* (1711) published in *The Spectator*:

> Truth was the founder of the family, and the father of Good Sense. Good Sense was the father of Wit, who married a lady of collateral line called Mirth, by whom he had Humour <…> Descending from parents of such different dispositions, Humor is very various and unequal in his temper (Addison, Steele 1809, 156).

Such allegorical works were written quite often to analyse and explain different terms. One of the first allegories dealing with wit was *The Play of Wyt and Science* (1530-40) by John Redford (1500–1547). Later on its adaptation was published as a sequel entitled *The Marriage of Wit and Science* (1569-70) (though sometimes its authorship is attributed to Sebastian Westcott (1524–1582)). Redford's influence can be traced in the play *The Contract of Marriage between Wit and Wisdom* (1579) composed by Francis Marbury (1555–1611). Although such works are allegorical in their nature, nevertheless, it is possible to see the changing attitude towards wit and its association with different concepts. Redford describes the play and the marriage of wit and science, meanwhile Marbury introduces a contract between wit and wisdom. It is worth remembering here that Addison proclaims the marriage of wit and mirth. This shows a shifting projection from wit, viewed as a serious matter related to science and wisdom, and wit that is limited to humorous character. This also suggests that the development of the term is worth to be analysed in order to perceive its connotations and contexts. Knowing the history of the term and considering its origin are important when analysing the literature of the earlier centuries more closely and in order to appreciate its intellectual content fully.

Obviously, the society's general sense of how intelligence can be most attractively displayed has changed. If wit and humour are approached from the seventeenth-century perspective – then humour is generally referred to a broad emotional atmosphere or mood; while wit mostly reflects intellectual originality, ingenuity and mental acuity. Although humour might become more intellectual and more refined and even less dependent upon the emotional result, wit will always be more complex and more sophisticated. While humour aims to amuse the reader, make him smile, laugh and relax, wit has a challenging, surprising or even shocking character. It calls for a special attention, inviting the reader to focus, read widely, but also deeply and the final award is not mirth but intellectual pleasure. Wit can last through centuries, be used again, reworked, described and analysed but jokes are

doubtless to survive the flow of time. Therefore, in this research the discourse of wit will not be regarded only as a subset of humour, but also as a rational intellectual construal which might be serious in its nature.

Moreover, as the discussed approaches to wit seem to be rather unstable, the theoretical fragments that were extended above should be united into a workable definition of wit to be applied in the analysis of the seventeenth century poetry, drama and prose. Summing up what has been already discussed above, *literary wit* could be distinguished as a verbal expression directly connected with the human faculty of sense; it is swift, brief, eloquent, ingenious and inventive in its nature; it favours both incongruous congruity, as well as surprise and fosters pleasurable effects with regard to intellectual gratification. This definition of literary wit is going to be applied in the analysis of the seventeenth-century selected English drama, poetry and prose in the empirical part of this thesis.

1.3. Taxonomy of literary wit and its techniques

Before carrying out the analysis of literary wit it is necessary to establish certain categories that could steer the research and confine its focus. Unfortunately, the scholarly resources that might provide the specific categories or at least guidelines for the analysis of literary wit are extremely scarce. After having surveyed the pertinent literature it can be assumed that literary wit has been admired yet not adequately examined properly. There are so many conflicting opinions concerning the term *wit* alone, that perhaps only a few dared to delve deeper into the backwater of this complex matter. Nevertheless, several ideas stood out that could comply with the present study. One of them is a quite general division of wit into *repartee* and *quip*. It is mostly applied to drama, however, it might be extended to other literary genres as well. The taxonomy of wit distinguished by Debra L. Long and Arthur C. Graesser (2009) has also been beneficial as it is, perhaps, the only extensive categorisation of wit that is available to this day. Last but not least, the three main categories embracing the modes, devices and functions of wit based on George Campbell's ideas presented in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776) and developed by Donald Duane Manson in *Bernard Shaw's Use of Wit in Selected Speeches* (1966) helped to organise the research in an efficient way. The three aforementioned classifications of wit are discussed in more detail below.

1.3.1. Modes of wit

To begin with, it is essential to examine how wit operates in discourse or, in other words, what its mode of functioning is. D. D. Manson invokes G. Campbell's observation to define what a mode of wit is. He states that it is "a particular way in which wit creates in the mind an usually agreeable surprise" (Manson 1966, 14). The element of shocking surprise, as discussed in the previous chapter, is an important element in wit construction to achieve its overall effect. The pleasing sensation of surprise is of intellectual character and is worked out by an inventive interplay of the familiar and the unfamiliar, i.e. by joining of the contradicting ideas thus achieving an unexpected relationship which is found as extraordinary friction. Nevertheless, any mode of wit relies on the sensitive of the reader/listener to be caught and enjoyed. In literary works, it requires a very special intellectual taste of the reader. In most general terms, wit can be used to display agility or mental superiority over another person in the conversation by acquiring the form of a verbal contest; or it can act as a sharp stroke of utterance to announce the speaker's original opinion or observation. To get the idea of how these two modes, i.e. quip and repartee act in the discourse they are further explored.

The English term ***repartee*** was derived from French; to be more precise, from fencing vocabulary where it meant a ritualized exchange of blows during a contest. It was first recorded in the early seventeenth century as a noun that originated from the verb *repartir* meaning 'to go again' and hence 'to reply promptly' (Harrison 1998, 221). Soon it acquired the meaning of "a spontaneous and witty comment that hits the spot after it has bounced back on a previous argument" (Blanchard, Leven 2007, 68). Similarly, M. H. Abrams and G. G. Harpham define it as the term which signifies "a contest of wit, in which each person tires to cap the remark of the other, or turn it to his own advantage" (Abrams, Harpham 2012, 241). As J. T. Shipley claims, such contests of wit have a longstanding tradition that dates back to the eclogues of Theocritus and Vergil composed as the manifestations of "a pastoral contest between shepherds for the prize of rustic song" (Shipley 2007, 148). Charles R. Gruner rationalizes that such contests were held quite often to satisfy the competitive nature of men:

> Language allowed our forbears to actively utilize their competitive instincts in another manner, and without the least danger of physical harm coming to them- in contests of wit. A great deal of historical and literary evidence points to the fact that early man put great stock in the back-and-forth question/answer games in which one person tires to "stump" the other for as answer (Gruner 1997, 21).

Even though the latter claims that contests of wit were harmless, the term's relation with fencing experience proposes the idea that, in fact, wit may be as deadly a weapon as a spear. As Paul Freeman warns, "wit can have a deadly aim and it is possible to prick a large pretense with a small pin" (Freeman 2009, 18). On the other hand, repartee could be compared to the foil of a fencing master. It should be agile, nimble yet elegant, requiring immediate perception. The person in hold of it should be capable of controlling the personal emotional state in order to find out the right words for the counter-attack. As the term suggests, this type of wit requires two or more participants and contains a competitive nature. Most importantly, it heavily relies on the contextual information and a fast response. The teller of a witty line and the recipient can exert power over each other in the repartee rounds. The former has an advantage of being the first to control the floor, but the latter can quickly overturn the situation and recapture the floor by a better line of wit. Nevertheless, the sole power belongs to the person making the last witty statement and completing the sequence. The contests of wit were held on several levels:

1. As courtly disputes to showcase the power over the interlocutor (or audience) demonstrating the art of displaying one's skills of verbalization. In, this aspect was of vital importance, otherwise one would confront raillery in court. Thus, wit became a way of life.
2. As exchanges of witty utterances between writers or poets to demonstrate their ingenuity (Blanchard, Leven 2007, 68).

Michelle O'Callaghan expands this idea in her analysis of the Jacobean verses "often taking the form of a contest of wit that serves to set up an internal hierarchy within the group that is a microcosm of a wider social hierarchy" (O'Callaghan 2000, 39). Hence, internal and social hierarchy could be restructured by this mode of wit. Indeed, in the seventeenth century, the faculty of sharp reasoning and expression was vital in order to survive and advance in social life. Rupert D. V. Glasgow also indicates that wit can be understood as a superior knowledge which can cause a situational or even power reversal (1995, 101). According to him, this mode of wit implies "mental agility and flexibility capable of begetting that swift response that can upturn or invert a situation" (ibid.). Obviously, it required both – exceptional verbal skills and a fast reaction of a receiver.

Another mode of wit is called *quip*. It is a clever observation or witty saying which descends more into a sarcastic commentary or remark. John Lyly explains the meaning of quip in his play *Campaspe* (1632):

PSYLLUS: <...> why, what's a quip?

MANES: We great girders call it a short saying of a sharp wit, with a bitter sense in a sweet word.

PSYLLUS: How canst thou thus divine, divide, define, dispute, and all on the sudden?

MANES: Wit will have his swing; I am bewitched, inspired, inflamed, infected[41].

This mode of witty expression is related with a special occasion or situation. Contrary to repartee, which requires the interlocutor to make a statement in order his rival could parry a blow and realize a witty retort; quip is viewed as more specialized wit where more information and mental flexibility is required to appreciate it. And as the potential for wit is directly proportional to the number and kinds of familiar situations which can be alluded to this mode of wit is usually accepted among the members of a small group. To quote William Hazlitt, "wit is a test of what is truth according to public opinion and common sense"[42]. For instance, various generations of writers were adapting, reusing and reinventing the previously composed texts by imparting the new meanings and novel interpretations to them. In such cases, wit can be seen as a contest between author and author, or author and reader. Nevertheless, both repartee and quip invoke ingenuity as their most important component.

While discussing the particular ways of wit's operation, Manson relies on Cambell's distinction between wit, humour and ridicule to form the four modes of wit:

1. The debasement of things which are pompous.
2. The aggrandisement of things which are small and frivolous.
3. The setting of ordinary objects in an unusual perspective.
4. Other (Manson 1966, 14).

In the given classification the first mode of wit refers to reduction; the second one, on the contrary, concerns exaggeration, and the third deals with the comparison of objects in an extraordinary way. The division may also contain any statement of wit structured in a mode that is not described in the previous

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[41] LYLY, J. (1632). *Campaspe*. Available at English Prose Drama Full-Text Database: http://www.letrs.indiana.edu/cgi-bin/eprosed/eprosed-idx?coll=eprosed;idno=P1.0159

[42] HAZLITT, W. (1818). *On Wit and Humour*. Available at: https://humorinamerica.wordpress.com/2012/09/20/in-the-archives-william-hazlitt-on-wit-and-humour-1818/

points. Even though Manson applies these modes for the analysis of witty speeches they are still applicable in the analysis of written discourse of wit.

Another more extensive classification has been proposed by Debra L. Long and Arthur C. Graesser. In their article *Wit and Humor in Discourse Processing*, they distinguish the taxonomy of wit which is, in their opinion, a beneficial, descriptive tool for the analysis of wit. They arrange the taxonomy in the following way, when wit is based on: irony, satire, sarcasm and hostility, overstatement and understatement, self-deprecation, teasing, replies to rhetorical questions, clever replies to serious statements, double entendres, transformations of frozen expressions, and puns (Long, Graesser 2009, 39).

As Long and Graesser believe that their taxonomy could be relevant to the research in text comprehension, it could certainly be applied to the analysis of witty texts. Moreover, though this taxonomy is far more elaborate in comparison with Manson's four modes of wit, some of its content could apply better to the devices of wit (i.e. irony, satire, sarcasm and hostility, puns). It is possible to observe that some of the modes of the former author coincide with the latter (i.e. debasement and understatement, aggrandisement and overstatement, setting of ordinary objects in an uncommon point of view and transformations of frozen expressions). Thus, in order to obtain as exhaustive the categorization as possible, the items which pertain more to the devices have been eliminated from the categorization of modes and instead the modes proposed by Manson are added to restructure and form a workable list of modes of wit for the further analysis. Hence, the following scheme has been worked out:

1. Overstatement;
2. understatement;
3. self-deprecation;
4. teasing;
5. replies to rhetorical questions;
6. clever replies to serious statements;
7. double entendres;
8. transformations of frozen expressions;
9. other.

Having worked out a final list of modes it is beneficial to discuss it in more detail. The first mode of wit is ***overstatement*** which includes "any extravagant statement or amplification or attenuation used to express emotion and not to be taken literally" (Norrick 2004, 1728). The ***understatement***, on the contrary, is used by the writers or speakers to intentionally make the situation seem less important than it really is (McKenzie 2015, 55). Long and Graesser state that

these modes of wit change by inflection the speaker's intended meaning as "often the last statement made is repeated with different emphasis to change the intended meaning" (2009, 42). They also note that usually the speaker indicates his attitude by the tone of his voice or inflection whereas in literary works it is done by italicizing or capitalization of adequate words.

The next mode of wit is ***self-deprecation***. It is a mode of wit by which the speaker makes himself a target of witticism. Long and Graesser note that the intention of this mode of wit is "to demonstrate modesty, to put listener at ease, or to ingratiate oneself to the listener" (ibid., 43). Gantar claims that "wit at one's own expense is, in this respect, not only safe mode of ridicule that allows the observers an ethically irreproachable enjoyment, but also a sign of wit's total liberty. Nothing is above the exercise of one's mental quickness, not even intelligence itself" (Gantar 2015, 107). However, this mode certainly requires exceptional discursive confidence to be able to undermine oneself.

Quite the opposite case is found with ***teasing*** which can be defined as an "intentional provocation accompanied by playful markers that together comment on something of relevance to the target of the tease" (Keltner at al. 2001, 229). It could be a comment about personal appearance or traits. Even though teasing communication can employ positive (e.g. to show affection) and/or negative (e.g. to humiliate) expressions, Long and Graesser suggest that, in most cases, they are positive and in this way this mode differs from *hostility* and *sarcasm* as the intention of teasing "is not to seriously insult, offend, or chastise" (Long, Graesser 2009, 43). If teasing is done in a friendly manner, it can serve a purpose of establishing social affiliation with another person or creating group cohesion. Moreover, it can be employed for reordering social hierarchies (Keltner et al. 1998, 1236). Thus, teasing that involves a positive outcome can be applied in friendship rituals and communicative patterns to develop a sense of intimacy.

The fifth mode is ***replies to rhetorical questions***. This mode "violates a conversational expectation as rhetorical questions are not asked with the expectation of a reply and in this case it is given by the listener as a surprise to a speaker and as an intention to entertain a conversational partner or audience" (Long, Graesser 2009, 43). A rhetorical question does not require or expect an answer as it is mostly used for the dramatic effect. Generally, the listener does not give an answer on purpose as there is an assumption that this type of question contains an answer in itself. The answer is encoded mentally by the teller within a rhetorical question. Therefore, by giving an answer to a rhetorical question the listener opens up a contest of wit, in which his answer operates as a repartee which is directed to top a rhetorical question.

Witty answers also prevail in the next mode of wit – *clever replies to serious statements* which invoke "clever, incongruous, or nonsensical replies to serious statements or questions" (ibid.). The element of surprise is also present here but it lies elsewhere since "the statements are deliberately misconstrued so that the listener replies to a meaning other than the one intended by the speaker. Alternatively, the listener may reply to an intention other than meant by the speaker" (ibid.). This mode of wit could certainly feature quip which expresses clever, yet sardonic observations.

Still another mode, *double entendre* also relies on the play on sense. In this mode, "a statement or a word is deliberately misperceived or misconstrued so as to evoke a dual meaning, which is often sexual in nature" (ibid.). This mode of wit can be employed by both the speaker and the listener. The speaker could utter double entendre which may be either deciphered by the hearer, or not. However, the speaker may not mean to evoke such an effect by his expression, but the listener can misinterpret it as double entendre, or deliberately reinterpret it as such thus causing the double meaning to appear. Hence, double entendre can be speaker/hearer-induced (Goth 2015, 79). This mode provides an equal ground for two or more speakers to showcase the smartness of their intelligence. According to Goth, a taxonomy of double entendres includes four different kinds of double entendres. The first kind concerns double entendres that "can be polysemous and consist in correlating two lexicalised meanings of a word or a phrase with one another"; the second kind of double entendres "can be figurative and add a metaphorical to a literal meaning"; the third kind involves double entendres which can "literalise a metaphor"; and the fourth kind contains double entendres that "supplement a phrase with further metonymic significance" (Goth 2015, 75).

Next mode of wit is *transformations of frozen expressions* which involves "transforming adages, well-known phrases, or shared knowledge into novel statements" (Long, Graesser 2009, 44). In this case, various folk-saws, literary aphorisms or citations are reworked and given most unexpected meanings. For instance, a well-known proverb can be ingeniously twisted in a new way as in "absence makes the heart grow fonder" and its innovative variation of "absence makes the heart go wander" (Mieder, Litovkina 2002).

The division with regard to the modes of wit involves one more mode entitled as 'other'. This was done purposefully by the scholars having in mind that there might appear some cases of wit which were not described by the former eight modes. Hence, this particular mode is going to be included in the full list of modes since the analysis of the selected seventeenth century literature might also reveal new modes of literary wit.

1.3.2. Stylistic devices of wit

The next step to discover the way wit operates is to explore its specific devices which are invoked by the writers in order to construct literary wit. It would be appropriate here to cite Emanuel Tesauro since his opinion on the stylistic devices of wit or, figures of speech is pertinent to the study of wit.

> Every witty expression is a figure of speech, but not every figure of speech is a witty expression. Figures of speech are properly called witty only when they signify something in an ingenious way. And not all ingenious significations deserve to be inscribed in the royal family of witty expressions, but only those whose exalted origins are in the noblest and most illustrious part of the intellect (Tesauro 1995, 471).

Manson (1966, 15) enumerates ten such devices which are applied in the witty expressions: metaphor, simile, hyperbole, pun, apostrophe, antithesis, irony, parody, allusion and other possible rhetorical devises which were not covered by the previously mentioned ones. By having added the rhetorical devices suggested by Long and Graesser, the following list was formed:

1. Metaphor;
2. simile;
3. hyperbole;
4. pun;
5. apostrophe;
6. antithesis;
7. irony;
8. parody;
9. allusion;
10. satire;
11. sarcasm and hostility;
12. other.

The most frequent expressions of wit arise in the process of linking the properties of objects in different categories which is metaphorical in its nature. Thus, it is possible to state that wit works as a metaphor by itself. According to Manson, **metaphor** is a figure of speech in which a word or several denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another in order to suggest a similitude between them (Manson 1966, 15). However, as Smith insists, it is not only similitude that a metaphor exposes. He maintains that "all forms of wit arise from the artificial likeness or unlikeness between properties in different categories of being" (Smith 2006, 51). Therefore, it is possible to claim that "metaphor establishes similitude between dissimilar things; in fact, the greater the dissimilarity between the objects compared with each other, the

wittier the metaphor" (Lambert 2002, 12). Tesauro elaborates on metaphor analysing the efficient causes of witty expressions. In his opinion wit or, as he entitles it, natural ingenuity is the power of intellect which comprises two talents: perspicuity and versatility (Tesauro 1995, 463). According to him, perspicuity "penetrates the farthest and most minute circumstances of every subject – substance, material, form, accident, properties, causes, effects, ends, sympathies, things similar, contrary, equal, superior, inferior, related signs, proper names, and equivocations: all of which lie wound up and hidden in any subject" (ibid.). Whereas versatility "quickly compares all the circumstances with each other and with the subject: it connects or divides them, increases of diminishes them; deduces one from the other; indicates one by the other, and with marvellous dexterity replaces one with another, as jugglers do with objects" (ibid.). The outcome of such an act is metaphor or, as Tesauro praises it, "the most ingenious and acute, the rarest and admirable, the most useful and the most amuseful, the most forceful and fruitful product of the human intellect" (ibid., 473). What is important though is the idea that, in their attempt to find similarities and differences, the writers not only find new qualities to compare but by comparing them they create new metaphors as well. Moreover, in the mind of an ingenious writer, simple metaphors go beyond themselves and turn into complex *conceits* or *extended metaphors* which were very popular among the Metaphysical poets: "A conceit consists in a vividly direct confrontation of unlike objects which throws up meaningful points of likeness or repugnance between them" (Smith 2006, 52). This type of metaphor can evoke a shocking effect but at the same time it is highly logical. It certainly requires an active involvement and going beyond or even stretching of the reader's imagination in order to comprehend what is being communicated by an adequate conceit. Thus, it not only arouses the creative thought through its interaction with senses but also mental agility of the reader.

A very similar device is *simile* which also involves a comparison between two unlike entities, but differently from metaphor, the resemblance is signalled by using the words 'like' or 'as'. Similes are mainly used to compare the animate and the inanimate revealing their similarities; at times they can also act as personifications. Ingenious and creative similes convey the writer's idea in a more precise and vivid way and, most importantly, appeal to the reader's imagination, thus opening new perspectives of viewing the world. Just like metaphors, similes can also be extended. As such, they are called *epic similes* or *Homeric similes* which refer to "formal, sustained similes in which the secondary subject, or vehicle, is elaborated far beyond its points of close

parallel to the primary subject, or tenor" (Abrams, Harpham 2012, 109). In this case similes comprise comparisons which are elaborate in considerable detail and can embrace several lines.

Hyperbole is another stylistic device of wit which denotes the writer's "extravagant exaggeration of a fact or possibility" (ibid., 166). Since this figure of speech acts as an intensifier and represents something in an excessive manner, it is not meant to be understood literally. Rather, it is used to create a stronger emphasis and effect on the listener/reader as it can highlight a certain idea, arouse intense feelings and thus provide a long lasting impression. Freeman also notes that it can be understood as "a type of logical extension of what is considered aberrant to begin with. When such a situation is caricatured through extreme exaggeration, the particular aberration is brought into high relief" (Freeman 2009, 247). This stylistic figure relies not only on the intellectual resourcefulness, but also on emotional intelligence of the speaker who inventively composes a hyperbole to unfold his/her emotions and relay them to the hearer/reader. Hence, depending on the context of their production hyperboles might transmit a vast scale of emotions starting with excitement and finishing with distress (see Braider 2011, 234-236).

Language is a major vehicle of wit and this is especially evident in the case of next device to be discussed, i.e. *pun*. Dirk Delabastita defines a pun in the following way:

> The general name indicating the various textual phenomena (i.e. on the level of performance or parole) in which certain features inherent in the structure of the language used (level of competence or langue) are exploited in such a way as to establish a communicatively significant, (near)-simultaneous confrontation of at least two linguistic structures with more or less dissimilar meanings (signifieds) and more or less similar forms (signifiers) (1993, 57).

According to their formal structure, puns can be classified into four types:

1. *The homophonic puns* are based on the exploitation of words or groups of words which are different in writing but identical in pronunciation (e.g. right – write);
2. *The homographic puns* are words or groups of words which are different in pronunciation but identical in writing (e.g. lead (to guide) – lead (metal));
3. *The homonymic puns* consist of words or word groups identical both in spelling and in pronunciation (e.g. bear (to carry) – bear (animal);
4. *The paronymic puns* are words or word groups which are nearly but not quite identical in spelling and pronunciation (e.g. adding in salt (a white substance that is added to food before or after cooking to improve its flavour) – insult (an offensive remark) (ibid., 79-80).

Though initially the term *pun* embraced a wide range of wordplay, at present it mostly denotes the application of the words that have an identical or nearly identical sounding and/or spelling and which are embedded in a context that is unusual for their meaning.

An ***apostrophe*** is a unique literary device which originates from the tradition of commentaries in the Classical writings. According to Manson, it is "an abrupt change, turning away from the audience in order to address an abstract person, or abstract inanimate character" (Manson 1966, 16). Hence, it can be described as a discourse movement when the current of discourse is diverted away from the intended target hearer. This is done as an effect of a high formality or a sudden emotional impetus. Many apostrophes denote a personification of the non-human entity that is spoken to (Abrams, Harpham 2012, 346). By addressing a particular city, a place or some object the character "implicitly or explicitly invests the addressee with the animate faculty of hearing"; moreover, by applying such a device the speaker has "the potential to address people or objects either present or absent, alive or dead" (Kneale 1992, 93). Apostrophe might be used by the speaker who is in a high emotional state to demonstrate excitement (e.g. exclamation), but at the same time it might indicate indignation and grief (e.g. outcry) (Kneale 1992, 91-95). Thus, it is a diverted witty address that reflects the inner perturbations or elation of the speaker, but is intentionally redirected from the actual target hearer. Deciphering the meaning of the apostrophe in literature always depends on an immediate literary context or the pre-text.

A device which can be expressed through parallelism of a grammatical pattern and is based on a strong contrast in meaning is called ***antithesis*** (Manson 1966, 16). It is worked out through an opposition or contrast of ideas which are conveyed by using "the corresponding members of two contiguous sentences or clauses, words which are the opposites of, or strongly contrasted with each other" (Gantar 2015, 94). Antithesis "lends itself perfectly to wit as the mode of discourse that in general relies on incompatible matrices of thought and language" (ibid.). Thus, a proposition made by the speaker can be contrasted with another statement or reversed in an unexpected twist that is usually executed at the end of the sentence in order to create a surprise in the mind of the reader. To say more, by the contrasting effect the speaker accentuates his idea better and puts an increased emphasis on it. As the antithesis reveals two ideas within one statement, it always involves a double meaning. The contrast and double meaning make the antithesis more memorable for the reader; hence, it is no wonder that many antitheses are borrowed from the original literary works and reused or reworked anew. They

are also found among the most quoted witty expressions. It should be noted here, that the shortest possible form of antithesis embraces merely two opposing words, yet this device can also be extended to contrasting clauses, sentences and even paragraphs.

Wit may also contain ***irony*** that commonly denotes a speech in which the implied attitudes or evaluations are in opposition to the literally stated ones. The traditional definition of irony states that the speaker expresses a statement in which the literal meaning is in direct opposition to its intended meaning (Abrams, Harpham 2012, 184). However, Douglas C. Muecke insisted that the old definition of irony "saying one thing and giving to understand the contrary" is somewhat outdated (Muecke 1986, 31). According to him, irony is, in fact, "saying something in a way that activates not one but an endless series of subversive interpretations" (ibid.). Thus, in its present understanding, irony might reveal a vision of life in general. Moreover, Long and Graesser claim that "ironic statements are evaluating; the speaker expresses a personal opinion" and that "this personal opinion need not always be negative" as irony might be employed "by speaker to praise or to blame" (Long, Graesser 1988, 42). Moreover, there are two types of irony:

> Irony, language device, either in spoken or written from in which the real meaning is concealed or contradicted by the literal meanings of the words (verbal irony) or in a situation in which there is an incongruity between what is expected and what occurs (dramatic irony).[43]

It is important to note that irony is a complex device which requires at least two agents in order to be realised: "the ironist, in his role of naïf, proffers a text but in such a way or in such a context as will stimulate the reader to reject its expressed literal meaning in favour of an unexpected 'transliteral' meaning of contrasting import" (Muecke 1986, 39). Therefore, as a discursive practice, ironical wit needs a perceptive reader to decipher an ironic message by interpreting its true intended meaning. As Wayne C. Booth observes in his book *A Rhetoric of Irony*, irony is a mutual achievement of the ironist and the interpreter (Booth 1974, 13). The reader must have a shared socio-cultural knowledge with the author in order to comprehend his irony. No doubt, by deciphering its meaning, the reader experiences the pleasure of "joining, of finding and communing with kindred spirits" (ibid., 28). Thus, irony can evoke a feeling of intimacy because of the common knowledge shared by its participants. Linda Hucheon is of the opinion that the interpretation of irony relies not so much on the interpreter's linguistic and cultural competence, but

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43   Britannica Academic Library. Available at:
      http://academic.eb.com.vlib.interchange.at/levels/collegiate/article/42812

on the shared discursive context (2005, 92). If such a discursive context is considerably different, as it is in the case of the seventeenth-century wit which is being decoded by the modern readers, then it must be explored in great detail to enable the comprehension of an ironic act. Hucheon maintains that readers misunderstand irony not because of ignorance, the lack of proper attention or emotional inadequacy, as it was thought by the earlier theorists, but because "the ironist and the interpreter belonging to different discursive communities which do not intersect or overlap sufficiently for the comprehension of an utterance as ironic to occur" (ibid., 93). Nevertheless, a successful realization of an intended ironic meaning provides the reader with the possibility to evaluate his personal perceptiveness and feel the intellectual connection with the author.

Another device employed in literary wit distinguished by Manson is *parody*. The scholar defines it as "a form which derides a particular literary work or style presenting an imitation of only its outward features" (1966, 16). Though, this device can be used for negative purposes as to emphasize a writing manner of a particular author exposing his weaknesses or overused conventions. It can also serve to express an admiration of a literary work as no parody can be written without a thorough exploration of an artistic work it attempts to mimic. As it is noted by Nil Korkut in his book *Kinds of Parody from the Medieval to the Postmodern*, the position of a parody towards its object is often conflicting and "may range from degradation and mockery to respectful admiration" (2009, 11). Thus, parody can be described as an artistic device which is frequently a source of creation and innovation. What is more, there is no fixed object that parody tries to imitate – be it an individual work or a personal style, a convention, a genre, or discourse (ibid.). Parody could represent intellectual preoccupations of a particular period. Wit employs parody to express criticism towards certain literary styles and practices. Even wit itself is known to have been imitated – especially its overly abundant application and in the parody of so called learned wit.

If parody is explicitly imitating its target, the next literary device *allusion* is, on the contrary, based on an implied or indirect reference to a person, thing, place, event or part of another text. Therefore, allusions depend on the assumption that there is the body of knowledge that the reader and the writer share and which enables the reader to identify the referent of a certain allusion. However, some authors deliberately employ obscure and complex allusions which cannot be understood without pre-existing knowledge about the object that is alluded to. Though they are sometimes treated as similar terms, allusion differs from imitation or parody in the initial intent of the writer as well as the

fact that allusion is grounded on "the metaphorical relationship" which is created in the reader's mind when "an alluding text evokes and uses another, independent text" (Pasco 2002, 12). This means that two texts can be activated at the same time, since the writer incorporates an alluded text into a different context of his text and this way they both acquire a new meaning.

According to Long and Graesser, *satire* is another category of wit which is "a statement of disparagement of some social institutions or social policy. The authors assert that in this case the intention of the speaker is "to critique some aspect of society" (Long, Graesser 1988, 92). However, satire pertains more to a genre of literature, rather, than device. Therefore, it was decided to eliminate it from the list of devices and exclude it from the analysis.

Sarcasm and *hostility* are such devices of wit which target "an individual rather than social institutions or policy. It is the intention of the speaker to chastise" (Long, Graesser 1988, 93). Sarcasm differs from irony in the way that it must be realised by a human being; whereas, irony can also be situational. Moreover, sarcasm is always intentional; meanwhile, irony can sometimes be unintentional (Haiman 1998, 20). Thus, sarcasm could be described as "a more precise form of bitterness" and due to this it is sometimes regarded as "the poorer, less sophisticated cousin of irony" and "the lowest form of wit" (Burton 2009, 77). However, it should not be taken for granted that sarcasm is only a weapon that can be used against others in order to attack and put down, since it also has the power to unite. This happens when several characters get united by their sarcastic remarks to show their contempt about a similar situation. Thus, sarcasm can create a distance by transforming the target into the other, but at the same time, it can integrate the demarcating the lines of a group that is producing sarcastic utterances. Similarly, the reader who spots and grasps a sarcastic message encoded by the writer feels that he belongs to the same group. Yet, the interpretation of sarcastic discourse is a complex matter since the speaker's intent is always the opposite of his message's literal meaning. On the surface, sarcasm has a positive or even polite manner; therefore, it might be misunderstood and misinterpreted. Sarcasm allows the speaker to state a positive message with a negative intent. It also provides the possibility for venting negative emotions without verbalizing the negativity or hostility directly and openly: "in such utterances, the positive message is visibly or audibly overlaid (or undermined) by the metamessage, which expresses speaker's actual contempt, indifference, or hostility towards his or her target" (Haiman 1998, 19).

In speech sarcasm can be indicated by a difference of tone, a slower tempo or a stress mark; however, in writing there are no commonly accepted ways

for indicating sarcasm or irony. Cues in writing are usually given (if at all) by various typographical methods: *italics*, making text **bold**, CAPITALIZATION, percontation point which is a reversed question mark (⸮), a reversed exclamation mark (¡) or scare quotes which are special quotation marks that are placed around a word or a phrase to signify that it is not used in the literal sense (see Houston 2013).

Though different devices have been discussed, it is still necessary to remember that wit is known for being able to transcend the limitations imposed on it. Thus, it is very likely that devices other than those described above can be used in an expression that contains wit.

1.3.3. Functions of wit

The last category to be examined deals with the functions of literary wit or, in other words, a role of wit in the language of writing. Relying on the functions proposed by Manson it is possible to construct the following list:

1. Wit is used to establish rapport, i.e. to gain and maintain an atmosphere of goodwill, understanding and common ground.
2. Wit is employed to attack or defend, to ridicule and refute the veracity of an opponent.
3. Wit is applied to cast light on an important point made by the interlocutor.
4. Other. This regards wit that has a function not covered by the above-given (Manson 1966, 15).

In the first function wit is related to "*sensus communis*, with overtones of common sense that tie it to Bouhour's *bon sens*, but also implying a sense held in common by all, as well as a sense for the common good of all" (Hill 1993, 20). Errett also notes that wit can be used for seductive purposes or in order to charm:

> Seduction via repartee is the goal of a thousand sonnets, and a fairly evolutionarily sound one at that: The suitor who can entrance his (or her!) beloved on the fly will probably also be able to improvise ways to protect that future mate from saber-toothed tigers. Similarly, the element of Charm is key to social advancement in all human societies. If romance is wit directed at one lucky person, charm is a more diffuse sharing of wit with the world (2014, 12).

In the second function, on the contrary, wit is employed as an instrument of social discipline. As such, it can be used to criticize, debase or mock, though sometimes with an intent to protect a person against his verbal rival. According to Errett, "one can certainly use spontaneous creativity to make

others suffer. In such instances, wit seems more like a social weapon than a grace, a sharp tool used not to repair but to damage" (ibid., 110).

The third function of wit is to emphasize a certain idea and direct the readers' attention towards it. Finally, since literary wit is versatile and complex, it can be applied by the writers for the individual purposes that might depend on their personal writing style, particular intentions or requirements of a literary genre, therefore a function entitled *other* was also added for unpredicted functions of wit.

This chapter focused on the key notions of literary wit, namely, on the conception of wit, which, at times, proves to be quite fluid, it also presented the taxonomy of wit and established modes of wit, devices of wit, and functions of wit which will enable to conduct the analysis of the selected seventeenth-century literature and disclose what characteristic modes, devices and functions of wit were applied. The next chapter continues to lay out the theoretical dimensions of the research concentrating on the semiotics of culture as the main rationale for the investigation. It highlights the key theoretical concepts by which the research of the discourse of literary wit is conducted.

2. CULTURAL SEMIOTICS: TEXT AS A MEANING-GENERATING MECHANISM

The analysis of the empirical material in the present thesis with regard to understanding the potentialities of literary wit in the seventeenth century is grounded on the framework of cultural semiotics developed by the literary scholar and semiotician Yuri Mikhailovich Lotman (1922 – 1993). This field of semiotics seeks to reflect upon culture as a fundamentally semiotic phenomenon and consider it as a system of meaningful signs which bear a particular meaning. According to the scholar, these are the key principles of culture:

> (1) each culture will have marks (or signs); (2) no singe culture is all-encompassing – rather, it is a bounded space that abuts non-cultural space; (3) cultures are always sign systems (as opposed to non-cultures, which are not); (4) cultures replace one another over time; (5) culture and natural language are indivisible; (6) culture is non-hereditary collective memory; (7) culture is only 'acknowledges post factum'; (8) culture is first and foremost a social phenomenon and, while individual culture is real, it is nonetheless a secondary phenomenon when viewed in the historical context of societal culture; (9) each culture creates its own model of its length of existence and continuity; (10) culture generates structure in order to construct its social basis; and (11) every culture is based on a 'presumption of structure' by its participants (Lotman 1978, 211-217).

These principles are significant since literary wit is culture-bound which means that the seventeenth-century culture could be treated as a mechanism which created a body of witty texts, but, at the same time, these texts were also a realisation of the culture. Therefore, theoretical principles of cultural semiotics are chosen to serve as the main scientific approach; whereas this chapter provides an explication of the relevant insights and terms which will be adopted in the exploration of witty literary discourse.

To begin with, cultural semiotics requires to be situated within the entire field of semiotics. In his article *The Semiotics of Culture and the Concept of a Text* (1988) Lotman explicates the two directions of semiotics predominant in the course of fifteen years of its development.

> The striving for precise modelling procedures has led to the creation of *metasemiotics*[44]: the object of study becomes not texts as such, but models of texts, models of models, etc. The second tendency concentrates its attention on the *semiotic functioning* of a real text (Lotman 1988, 52).

Hence it is possible to claim that the author refers to two directions: the theoretical, which would pertain to metasemiotics, and the empirical, which

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[44] Emphasis is mine.

deals with the analysis of texts. The scholar uses Saussurean terminology in order to elaborate on the two directions and discern their differences. He states that in the first case, the researcher is interested in *langage* which is "a materialization of the structural laws of a *langue*", whereas in the second one, the object of investigation is "semiotic aspects of a text that diverge from the linguistic structure" (ibid.) As it has been already mentioned, the first direction is actualised in metasemiotics, and the second one "gives birth to the semiotics of culture": metasemiotics is orientated towards the realisation of language, while the semiotics of culture focuses on the cultural context, i.e. multiple interrelated sign systems and the functioning of a text within a particular culture (ibid.). It is also important to note that within Lotman's conceptual framework culture is treated as a complex metasystem which can function "only by being immersed in a specific semiotic continuum" (Lotman 2005, 206). In other words, culture requires a special domain or semiotic space in which its subjects can experience signification. Lotman rationalises about it in the following way:

> <…> semiotic space may be regarded as a unified mechanism (if not organism). In this case, primacy does not lie in one or another sign, but in the "greater system", namely the semiosphere. The semiosphere is that same semiotic space, outside of which semiosis itself cannot exist (ibid., 208).

The semiotics of culture changed the understanding of the traditional semiotic notions. It has departed from the analysis of a single language to the exploration of the interaction between various sign systems within culture. Lotman states that it takes at least two languages or, as he calls it, "the minimal meaning-generating unit", for semiotic space to realise its meaning potential and for any cultural text to exist (1992, 16). This wider perspective gave rise to the idea of a mandatory doubling of code and altered the traditional concepts of a text a great deal:

> The original concepts of a text, which stressed its unitary signal nature, the indivisible unity of its functions in any cultural context, or some other qualities, implicitly or explicitly assumed that a text was a statement in some one language. The first crack in this seemingly self-evident idea occurred when the concept of a text was examined at the level of the semiotics of culture. It was found that for a given message to be defined as a "text," it had to be coded at least twice (ibid., 53).

Lotman stresses the idea of a dual coding and believes that a text cannot be a realisation of a single language because there exists a secondary system. His view concerning artistic texts is also based on the notion such texts are "fundamentally dualistic" (Lotman 2004a, 73). This means that an artistic text is, on the one hand, "simulat[ing] reality, suggesting it has an existence

independent of its author" and, on the other hand, "remind[ing] us that it is someone's creation and that it means something" (ibid.). The scholar differentiates between natural languages, artificial languages (the metalanguages which are applied in describing science) and secondary languages viewed as "communication structures built as superstructures upon a natural linguistic plane" (Lotman 1977, 9). He claims that a natural language is one of the earliest systems of communication which later turned into a ritualised formula encoded in a secondary language, i.e. a text (Lotman 2004b, 136). Thus, literature is perceived as a *secondary modelling system* (hereafter SMS) to the natural language operating as a *primary modelling system* (hereafter PMS).

Based on this, all art can be described as a secondary language and any specific work of art as a text delivered in that language. Such a text is the basis for communication that takes place between the writers, or addressers, and the readers who act as addressees. However, the semiotic structure of SMS and PMS is entirely different since SMS is not a mere elaboration of PMS, but rather a complex interplay of different semiotic worlds. Lotman examines the structures of both systems and comes to the conclusion that "the complexity of a structure is directly proportional to the complexity of the information transmitted. As the nature of the information grows more complicated, the semiotic system used to transmit that information grows more complicated" (Lotman 1977, 10). Such complexity reveals the difference between primary and secondary languages. What is more, in PMS the complexity is undesired as it obstructs the transfer of the information from the addresser to the addressee. While the structure of SMS is much more complex than that of PMS but this is seen as an advantage since "a complicated artistic structure <…> allows us to transmit a volume of information too great to be transmitted by an elementary, strictly linguistic structure" (ibid.). What the scholar means is that the writer's thought is realised in this specific artistic structure intentionally and prudently. If this same artistic thought were retold in an ordinary speech, the entire structure of the work would be destroyed and the addressee would receive a completely different information from the one intended in the initial structure, i.e. a literary work. Hence, "the artistic text is an intricately constructed thought. All its elements are meaningful elements" (ibid.,12).

The SMSs are subdivided into non-artistic (representing myth, religion and folklore) and artistic ones. As carriers of information, SMSs penetrate all the levels of communication networks. Due to its specific structure, an artistic text allows for a much more complex form of modelling. In it information differs

from that contained in everyday speech because of a surplus value related to both the structure of the work and the process that produces its structure. Hence, the reading of a literary text will necessary be a double experience, since such a text is both an autonomous entity and an expression of something more significant. In Lotman's opinion, SMSs constitute a complex semiotic totality known as culture. Thus, "culture may be regarded as a hierarchy of particular semiotic systems, as the sum of texts and the set of functions correlated with them, or as a certain mechanism which generates these texts" (Lotman et al. 1975, 73). Consequently, a work of art is by itself a sign operating within the sign system of culture. In this respect, the notion of text gets expanded toward the notion of culture. Hence culture is seen as a unique text which includes non-verbal systems, while an individual text is conceived as part of a culture text which turns to be the most abstract model of reality in relation to the specific culture. Therefore, it is possible to describe it as a representation of a cultural worldview of that culture (Lotman 2004b, 81).

What is more, a culture text or art in general is perceived as a means of communication. Lotman outlines the general characteristics of artistic communication and claims that any act of such communication involves a sender (addresser) and a receiver (addressee) of information:

> If a work of art communicates something to me, if it serves the goal of communication between sender and receiver, then it is possible to distinguish in the work: 1) a message - that which is transmitted to me; 2) a language - an abstract system, common to sender and receiver, which makes the very act of communication possible (1977, 15).

Nevertheless, he also warns that "in order to receive the information transmitted by art, one must master its language" (ibid., 14). This is an important aspect since literary texts invoke an adequate language with conventional semiotic signs to be communicated. These signs depend on the agreement between the speakers of a particular language and their culture. Thus, for someone outside of such a linguistic community, the semiotic signs might not carry any meaning or their meaning might be perceived from a different perspective. It is clear that, in order to understand a work of art with its complex structure, figurative language and various stylistic devices, the reader needs more specific knowledge and understanding of certain conventions. Moreover, an artistic text possesses other important features:

> The creation of a work of art marks a qualitatively new stage in the growing complexity of the structure of a text. A multilayered and semiotically heterogeneous text may be capable of entering into complex relations both with the surrounding cultural context and with its readers; it ceases to be an elementary message from sender to receiver. Revealing a capacity to condense

information, it acquires memory. At the same time, it reveals a quality that Heraclitus defined as "self-growing logos". At this stage of growing structural complexity, a text displays the properties of an intellectual device: it not only conveys the information put into it from without but also transforms messages and develops new ones (Lotman 1988, 55-56).

This means that the complexity of information included in the text is directly proportional to the structural complexity of the text. Moreover, the text both contains and receives additional information and collects it in its memory. At such a phase, a text no longer denotes simple messages from the author to the reader but acquires intellectual qualities which enable it to participate in the communicative exchange and perform several socio-communicative functions which are going to be discussed in the following subchapter.

2.1. Socio-communicative functions of the text

The growing complexity of the texts attributes to several important socio-communicative functions. According to Lotman, they are realised in the following five processes:

1) "Communication between addresser and addressee. A text fulfils the function of a message from the bearer of information to the audience" (ibid., 55).

Here a text acquires an important function of transmitting an author's message to the potential reader. Lotman highlights that, due to its high semantic saturation, an artistic text is "the most economical, compact method for storing and transmitting information" (Lotman 1977, 23). However, literary texts display a multiple coding, thus their message can be understood solely by the receiver with specific reading competencies. That is why he proposes that the practice of text comprehension can be regarded as deciphering of a message which is possible through the following steps:

> The reception of a message, the choice (or manufacture) of a code, and the comparison of text and code. In the process of interpretation, systemic elements, which are the carriers of meaning, are distinguished in the message. Nonsystemic elements are not perceived as carriers of information and are discarded (ibid. 57).

Thus, it is important for the reader to know in which language or code the text is encoded as such knowledge will enable him to decipher the textual signs through a communicative and productive reading. The textual socio-communicative functions could be implemented to witty literary texts. Having this in mind, it is possible to recognise such texts as messages sent by the seventeenth-century authors (addressers) to their audience (addressee).

2) "Communication between the audience and the cultural tradition" (Lotman 1988, 55).

The reader is gaining knowledge while communicating with an artistic text which fulfils the function of "a collective cultural memory" (ibid.). A text can carry information from the past to the future which can be revived in a communicative process of reading and re-reading. Nonetheless, as the scholar notes, while some information can be fixed in texts and waiting to be excavated and passed on, other information can be lost or totally forgotten. Hence, a text has "a capacity for continual replenishment and for retrieving some aspect of the information stored in it and temporarily or totally forgetting others" (ibid.). Lotman believes that within one culture there is always a certain amount of texts containing the codes that are lost with time, thus the process of new code creation is frequently understood as reconstruction or "remembering" (2004b, 11). On the basis of this insight, the presumption can be made that, as far as the concept of wit has changed so much from the seventeenth century to this day and its modern definition does not reflect the true essence of wit that was invoked in the literary works of the aforementioned period, this type of discourse has lost some of its codes and they need to be reconstructed anew since literary wit is capable of transmitting and conserving cultural wisdom (Michelson 2000, 5). Therefore, their reader is involved in a complex communication with the seventeenth century English cultural tradition.

3) The third process involves "communication of the reader with himself" (Lotman 1988, 55).

The communicative act might also be intrapersonal or, in other words, directed towards the reader himself. As it is stated by Lotman, the text, "retrieves certain aspects of the personality of the addressee himself" (ibid.). He also notes that this is particularly significant for traditional or ancient texts as they are notable by their "high degree of canonicity" (ibid.). In this type of communication, i.e. when the recipient of information communicates with himself, the text acts as "a mediator, helping to reorganize the personality of the reader and change its structural self-orientation and the extent of its links with metacultural constructions" (ibid.). Hence, while communicating with himself through a literary text functioning as a mediator, the reader decodes the information which leads to restructuring of his actual self. The reader reconstructs the essential projection of his personality which is "an individual set of socially significant codes" that is constantly changing in the act of communication (Lotman 1990, 22). Hence, it is possible to say that while reading a text the reader is also reading himself.

This process represents one of the most important aspects present in the analysis of witty texts. Literary texts saturated with intricate wit pose a tough challenge to the reader while decoding their meaning. Usually, the reader recognises wit when the interpretation that he constructed does not provide adequate aesthetic effects. Then he is forced to make a pause in order to revise the interpretation or alter it so that relevant witty effects would be perceived. The reader is confronted with multiple interpretive possibilities which the text offers. The choice of a proper code to unravel an intellectual riddle provides an opportunity for aesthetic intellectual satisfaction: "successful interpretations of witty utterances flatter the reader in much the same way that puzzle-solving does: the more quickly he arrives at the intended interpretation and resolves the momentary quandary posed by the text, the more highly he rates his intellectual powers" (Furlong 2011, 139). Hence, the reader experiences pleasure in detecting the concealed meaning; he celebrates his own critical acumen and regards textual eloquence as a self-compliment. Therefore, it could be stated that witty texts are mediators which firstly destabilise the reader's thinking to bring him into deeper self-awareness and catalyse a more critical view of their own identity.

4) The text might also take a role of an interlocutor.

This happens in the process of communication between the reader and the text, the text not acting as a mediator anymore. A highly organised text demonstrating intricate intellectual qualities "becomes an interlocutor on an equal footing, possessing a high degree of autonomy" (Lotman 1988, 55). Thus, in the act of communication between the author acting as the addressant and the reader who is the addressee, the text functions "as an independent intellectual structure, playing an active and independent role in dialogue" (ibid.). The scholar provides even bigger autonomy to the text in *The Text and the Structure of Its Audience* (1982). Here he expresses an idea that a text can select its own reader modifying him in its own projection. He deliberates on it in the following way:

> This phenomenon is bound up with the fact that any text (and especially a literary one) contains in itself what we should like to term the image of the audience and that this image actively affects the real audience by becoming for it a kind of normatizing code. This is imposed on the consciousness of the audience and becomes the norm for its own image of itself, being transferred from the text into the sphere of the real behavior of the cultural collective (Lotman 1982, 81).

Lotman highlights the significance of the text and maintains that its relation with the reader is not based on a passive perception but comes out to be an active dialogue; or, if the author is taken into account, even a polylogue. This

especially concerns witty texts as wit can be realised only through a more intimate communication between the reader and the text. Texts endowed with wit have a capacity to select their readers as they definitely require the ones with exceptional analytical, interpretative skills and taste. Not every reader is ready to take a challenge of getting engaged in a contest of wit and those who accept it can also be further discouraged by their interpretive failures: "If a text, or specific moments within a text, can break away in unpredictable directions, embarrassing the one-two-three dance steps of interpretive methodology. Then a natural inclination is to steer clear of that kind of art, as if it were some enemy position too strong to engage head-on (Michelson 2000, 143). Thus, the dialogue between the reader and a witty text can sometimes be seen as wrestling. The readers can even "feel resentment when they fail to perceive wit, or to resolve the difficulties presented by witty utterances" (Furlong 2011, 139). However, as Michelson points out, a productive interaction can be achieved if communication with witty texts does not remind of an interrogation, reduction of wit, or its avoidance: "When it is read with lively humility, and with renewed wonder not only for possibilities within the work but also within ourselves, then literary wit can open to us as a source of intensity, insight, and pleasure" (Michelson 2000, 143).

5) The final process of communication is by far the most complex as it invokes several functions of the text. In the communication between the text and its cultural context the text ceases to be a mere "an agent of a communicative act" but becomes "a full-fledged participant in it" functioning as "a source or a receiver of information" (Lotman 1988, 55).

According to Lotman, the text might be metaphorical in its nature towards the cultural context; it can be understood as "a substitute for the overall context to which it is, in a certain respect, equivalent, or as metonymic" (ibid.). In this respect, the text signifies the context as "a part of the whole" (ibid.). Moreover, since the cultural context is elaborate and manifold itself, the text can establish different relations with different structural levels of the context at the same time (ibid). One more peculiarity of the texts treated as constant and established structures is their capacity to move from one context to another. Lotman maintains that this generally happens with "long-lived works of art" when they transfer into another context where they "self-recode" to adjust to a new situation (ibid). Hence, the text acquires the function of "an informant that has moved to a new communicative situation" (ibid.). It is possible to state that the text "becomes more significant than itself alone and acquires the features of a cultural model" when it likens itself "to the cultural

macrocosm"; but at the same time, it also tends to affect an independent behaviour when it "likens itself to the autonomous individual" (ibid.).

From all that has been stated above it is possible to define a text in a new light. It is no more regarded as a mere means to realise a message delivered in a single language. Rather, it is an elaborate system consisting of various codes that can transform messages and generate the new ones. Moreover, the text is viewed as an intellectual individual. Such conception alters the perception of how the relationship between the text and the reader takes place. As Lotman asserts, the notion "a user deciphers the text" can be changed into a more exact one "a user communicates with the text" as he "enters into contact with it" (ibid., 57). From this standpoint, a text cannot be perceived in isolation since it demands an active participation of its interlocutor to be activated. It is also observed that texts can pass from one cultural context to another, they can move to a totally different communicative situation and act as informants in it. A text can represent an entire cultural context or a "a cultural model" which leads to the thought that it has a capacity of functioning as "the cultural macrocosm" in itself (ibid. 56).

If witty texts are considered within this framework, several aspects should be stressed. They can function both sources and receivers of information which they can transfer acting as informants that travel through the centuries to reach a contemporary communicative situation. They also have the ability to self-recode in a new interpretive landscape. Since witty texts are discourses made distinct by the context, they can also reflect the context as a part of the whole. Thus, it might be possible to deduce the semiotic whole: in this case, the cultural and intellectual context of the seventeenth-century England, through the reconstruction or rejuvenation of a part of that context i.e. witty literary texts. However, in order to do that the reader or interpreter must have specific competence since, as an autonomous individual, a witty text requires intelligent interlocutors because "for intelligence to function there must be another intelligence" (Lotman 1990, 2). The following subchapter explores the process of such communication of wit operating as a significant textual element.

2.2. The process of decoding the meaning of literary wit

Witty texts as literary superstructures or intricately constructed artistic thoughts do not open up for an easy act of communication. The reason why artistic communication is so complex might lie in the fact that its message relationships are of two types only – reflecting coincidence and non-

coincidence (Lotman 1977, 23). The receiver of the message must not only decipher its meaning with the help of a particular code, but also determine the language in which the text is encoded. The process of reception might differ depending on the common knowledge shared by the author and the reader. Lotman distinguishes the following possible occurrences which might appear in the zone that exists between non-comprehension and comprehension:

> I. a) The receiver and sender use a common code. <…> b) The reception of contemporary, popular, stereotyped texts is a variant of a). A code common to sender and receiver is also at work (ibid. 24).

This reception mechanism could be applied to the comprehension and interpretation of literary wit. In the case I. a) an occurrence is possible in the artistic communication between the original seventeenth-century audience and the authors of witty texts. It would be correct to assume that these particular readers or viewers, if, for instance, drama is taken into account, had mutual knowledge of codes which made their communication much easier and faster as the evaluation of deciphering abilities was directly related, and still is, to the time that is required to unravel the meaning of the sender's message.

Case I. b) might have been used by the original audience as well. Lotman stresses that in order to receive the message "the reader must select from the artistic languages at his disposal that one in which a text or part of a text is encoded" (ibid.) What is more, "the very selection of one of a number of familiar codes creates additional information" (ibid.). This is also applicable to the contemporary readers who have the knowledge about the discussed period since the receiver has to make a choice and select a particular artistic language of the sender in order to decode it. This interpretative mechanism requires, at least in part, the inherent knowledge from the receiver.

But there are yet even more elaborate communicative relationships which are described as follows:

> II. The reader attempts to decipher the text by applying a code which is different from the one that the author uses (ibid.).

In such a case two types of processes might happen:

> a) The receiver imposes his own artistic language on the text, where upon the text is recoded (which occasionally involves even the destruction of the structure created by the sender). The information which the receiver seeks to receive is still one message in a language already known to him. In this instance an artistic text is treated as though it were non-artistic.
> b) The receiver attempts to perceive the text according to familiar canons, but through trial and error is convinced of the necessity of creating a new code, the one as yet unknown to him. A series of interesting processes now occur. The receiver enters into a struggle with the language of the sender and may be

defeated. The writer forces his language on the reader who adopts it as his means for modelling life (ibid. 25).

It could be stated that witty texts have two types of their readers. Type II a) relationship reflects the interpretative practice of the readers who see literary wit of the seventeenth-century from the prevailing contemporary perspective ignoring its original purpose, the historical and cultural contexts of the text etc. If such a reader imposes his own contemporary language on the witty text from the seventeenth century it might cease to be an artistic utterance but rather become a transformed (or even simplified) everyday wisecrack. It is also possible that the reader may not find a code at all and, as a result, the artistic text would cease to act as an aesthetic entity.

A different case is found with the readers of II b) type. Here the reader takes a task of deciphering a witty message of a particular artistic text and makes multiple attempts at textual decoding, thus learning from his errors until he is forced to work out a new code on the basis of the gained knowledge and reject his initial understanding. Lotman regards such decoding as *translation* which is a creative act performed by the reader (1990, 14). Obviously, translation becomes very difficult when the sender's language and codes are different from the ones the receiver possesses. However, the scholar believes that precisely in the cases when translation seems to be nearly impossible the most valuable results are achieved. Lotman defines the characteristics of such translation in the following way:

> For the results are not precise translations, but approximate equivalences determined by the cultural-psychological and semiotic context common to both systems. This kind of 'illegitimate', imprecise, but approximate translation is one of the most important features of any creative thinking. For these 'illegitimate' associations provoke new semantic connections and give rise to texts that are in principle new ones (ibid. 37).

It should be stresses that the meaning of an artistic text is not just an internal matter: it is inhered in the text's relation to wider systems of meaning, to other texts, codes and norms in literature and society as a whole. Thus, a witty utterance may be unravelled by the language which is regarded as a code (or the underpinning system of meaning) and is passed on by the writer to the reader, at the same time relying on the original historical and cultural contexts of the text.

The attempts at the exploration of the nature of literary wit inevitably lead to the question whether it is a pure product of language, the construal requiring the involvement of a specific reader or a trait of the author's way of reasoning. Lotman accentuates the active participation of all the three, the author, the

reader and the text in the communicative practice which produces meaning. This thesis will attempt to reveal that it is the interaction among these three agents that produces the discourse traditionally perceived as wit. The text and the reader evenly influence each other as the text would remain only a text unless the reader indulges in its original imagery and intellectual twists. In this triangle, meaning is a connecting link that evolves from the writer to the reader through the text. It should be noted that the author may know more than the reader, and his perspective may offer the reader a unique insight and intellectual pleasure. The seventeenth-century writers tried to have a close contact with their readers and kept them in mind during the writing process. Indeed, understanding the expectations of the readers inspired their style of writing. Hence even during the writing process an artistic piece is being composed as a polylogue involving the author, the text, the characters (if a drama is being taken into account) and the reader. Thus, in order for literary wit to become a living organism, the reader is just as much necessary as the writer, since it is the reader who plays a significant cooperative role in deciphering or translating the author's artistic message.

Any literary work consists of two poles: the artistic pole pertains to the text created by the writer, yet the aesthetic implies the final realisation of the work accomplished by the participation of the reader. In view of this polarity, a literary work "cannot be identical with the text or with the realization of the work, but in fact must lie halfway between the two" (Isler 1972a, 274). This idea holds in itself a clear correlation to wit, as understanding of witty expressions is directly related to an aesthetic and intellectual appreciation, i.e. if the reader possesses a particular reception mechanism to decode the message of literary wit through interpretation. As Georges Poulet maintains in his essay *Criticism and the Experience of Interiority*, the interpretation of the text is possible only if the reader's consciousness is open to fuse with that of the author:

> Take a book, and you will find it offering, opening itself. <…> It asks for nothing better than to exist outside itself, or to let you exist in it. In short, the extraordinary fact in the case of a book is the falling away of the barriers between you and it. You are inside it; it is inside you; there is no longer either outside or inside (Poulet 2007, 57).

Thus, it could be stated that the text is inviting or rather provoking the reader to experience the pleasure at the challenging difficulty of overcoming the barriers built up by the complex codes of the verbal art of wit. The comprehension of witty expressions awards the reader with an exceptional "bliss" and intellectual satisfaction. Unfortunately, not all the readers possess a peculiar sense of vocation in the field, especially, modern readers when they

encounter the cases of literary wit expressed in the earlier centuries. Hence, the process of reading and interpreting witty discourse could be treated as a dynamic and complex artistic communication between the author, the reader and the text where meaning needs to be realised by the reader leaving behind his preconceived notions, shedding away basic beliefs about particular contexts, shattering the expectations and remodifying them with newly obtained knowledge while unravelling the system of meaning, decoding and constructing new senses which would be coherent with the textual fabric of a literary work.

The exploration of the texts containing literary wit in the light of above mentioned theories makes it possible to discern certain interpretative movements. In her paper *The Soul of Wit: A Relevance Theoretic Discussion* (2011) Anne Furlong analyses the process by which witty effects are produced in the reader/interpreter. Though her approach is more pragmatic and centres on the relevance theory, it is still the only detailed investigation of the interpretative process and is especially beneficial as it distinguishes several steps for the inferential process of the understanding of wit. The author arranges its steps in the following sequence:

1. *The text challenges the reader to construct a specific interpretation*[45] (Furlong 2011, 140).

Already at the first step 'the text challenges the reader' as if warning him that the process of reading or interpretation will demand a great deal of intellectual effort. This means that witty texts require specific readers whom the author kept in mind during the process of composition and whom the texts reflect. Lotman states that a text contains "the image of the audience" and is therefore capable of selecting its readers (Lotman 1982, 81). Hence, in order to begin the process of interpretation of wit, the reader should possess specific competences as to get something out of the text the reader must, first of all, put something into it.

2. *Initial interpretation produces adequate contextual effects and thus justifies the endeavour the reader has made to work out his/her meaningful interpretation* (ibid.).

The reader must be aware of how language situations are turned or twisted into something often shockingly unexpected as he may come across the point in the text where the interpretation suddenly fails to be revised as is pointed out in the following step.

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[45] Emphasis is mine.

3. *However, the interpretation ceases to bring adequate effects. The reader experiences a pause in his or her interpretation process* (ibid.).

When the reader starts reading a work of literature it produces particular expectations. However, in the case of witty texts or any other artistic texts, these expectations are seldom being matched. Thus, the reader gets not a fulfilment of his expectations but rather their continual modifications. He notices that his interpretation is not quite fitting with regard to the context of the witty discourse. Therefore, he takes extra processing time in an attempt to reconstruct the interpretation and reach an adequate effect.

4. *The reader/interpreter revises his/her interpretation* (ibid.).

At this point, the text not only calls its own reader for cooperation but also urges him to make a series of interpretative choices. It is worth mentioning that wit arises in tracing connections where none seemed to exist. Its effect may surpass the reader's previous expectations or prejudices. However, wit can only operate within a mutually familiar context, this means that if it is new to the reader, it might happen that a witty expression fails to attract the reader's attention. But, as a rule, there is something else beside the context in witty discourse that provokes the reader to try another interpretation. It is possible to say that a text invites the reader to take action and get involved in a proper response to it. This strongly resembles the situation when a modern reader tries to decipher a witty discourse of the seventeenth century literature and can identify the hints but has no knowledge as to how he should approach them. Thus, in order to feel an aesthetic delight in grasping the wit he must go through an elaborate process by considering the author's remarks, analysing unfamiliar contexts, expanding his previous knowledge and opening his mind to new meanings.

In fact, as Lotman maintains, "the author changes the extent of the reader's memory, since the reader, when he receives a text of the work by virtue of the make-up of human memory, is able *to recall what his memory did not know*" (Lotman 1982, 86). In Furlong's sequence, this is evident in the next step.

5. *<…> the new found interpretation fosters a variety of other contextual effects which are wider in scope, amount and appropriateness in comparison with the interpretation that failed* (ibid.).

The failure of the first attempt and the discovery of the second possibility evoke the sensation of surprise. To quote Paul Freeman, wit "almost always is accompanied by brief surprises couched in language" (Freeman 2009, 15). A sudden reward is the sense of discovery of the successful code and thereby a significant element in experiencing the effects of wit, since it includes the reader as a participant or rather as a co-creator of the meaning. As far as both

the author and the reader are involved in the discursive interaction (one, by composing the actual witty text and the other, by interacting with it in the process of its meaning decoding), it becomes possible to distinguish whether a given expression, its author and the reader could be regarded as witty, or not. According to Furlong, "a witty writer is one who has constructed the utterance so that the reader will be led through this process as quickly as his particular cognitive resources will permit; and a witty reader is one whose cognitive resources permit him to go through the interpretive hoops very quickly indeed, relative to other readers" (Furlong 2011, 145). Hence, if witty discourse is interpreted successfully, it compliments the reader; the quicker he discovers the intended interpretation the higher he rates his own intellectual abilities. Lotman also notes that decoding of the text results in an intellectual pleasure:

> Thus intellectual pleasure occurs as a result of the application of a code or a small number of logically connected codes to the message (this is itself the source of pleasure - a mass of variegated material is reduced to one system). In considering the speed with which the human brain works, we should note that the time span of intellectual pleasure or understanding (assuming that we do not include the preceding moments of "non-understanding") is infinitesimally small. It is instantaneous (Lotman 1977, 58).

Literary wit is known to be the source of intensity in the texts, but at the same time it can cause an emotional and intellectual tension for the reader who tries to decipher its verbal artistry. The discovery of a proper code evokes surprise and also produces a very high emotional state due to the increased tension and its release during the process of decoding of a witty message that was so challenging to obtain.

Lotman proposes the idea that while reading the text the reader is also reading himself and reformulating his own identity. In his essay *The Text and the Structure of Its Audience* he states that the audience "ceases to be automatically implied in the text and becomes a signified (i.e. free) artistic element which can enter the text as part of a game" (Lotman 1982, 84). According to him, the readership is an element in the game and they are divided into two groups: the ones, who can comprehend the text and are, therefore, intimately familiar with the author (as they share common knowledge); and others, who are aware that there is something hidden in the text but cannot decode it. The understanding that in order to unravel the text the reader has to be in "the position of intimate familiarity" with the author, prompts the readers to envisage themselves in their relation with the text. Consequently, the reader regards himself as an intimate friend of an author who shares with him "a special, unique memory" that helps to decode the text

(Lotman 1982, 85). Accordingly, literary wit can be seen as a common achievement of the writer and the reader since both are involved in the game.

It should be noted that interpretation of literary wit requires not only an intelligent but also an imaginative mind. Therefore, reading and decoding literary wit is always an active and creative practice. The writer strives to activate the imagination of his readers in order to help them realise witty literary expressions. However, in the game of imagination, just as in the analysis of witty discourse, the text may occur to be too straightforward or too complex which may force the reader to leave the play. Thus, in a way, it is a prerogative of the author to keep the reader engaged continually without making him too overwhelmed by the intricacy of the text and not to discourage him from reading. However, the writer does not intend to make the readers' task too simple. In fact, it is the very challenge that keeps the reader striving to look for more. As Tesauro observes:

> Wit loses its insight when a saying is too clear. <…> And this causes the double pleasure of one who forms a witty concept and another who hears it. For the first enjoys giving life in another's intellect to a noble product of his own, and the second enjoys grasping by his own ingenuity what the ingenuity of another furtively hides (1995, 462).

Thus, the interpretation of a witty utterance requires just as much wisdom as its composition.

It is possible to assume that an interpretation of the seventeenth-century literary wit also brings the readers into a new critical awareness about their personal identities. The entire process of literary wit identification and its analysis is intricate and at times unpredictable as it can lead to various results – force the reader to question his choices, make him go back, revise, leave the pre-existing assumptions, alter a way of seeing the world, and stretch the imagination to a new horizon. The witty texts of the analysed period should be interpreted having a particular semiosphere in mind. The readers have to go above and beyond in order to capture the meaning of the literary wit expressed within a particular work of literature. The act of reading and interpreting literary wit can be regarded as an active communicative practice between three equally engaged agents – the writer who composes a literary work, the reader who activates it during the process of interpretation and, of course, the text which transmits the information and is also capable of generating a new one. It is through this dynamic communicative participation of all the three agents that the meaning of the literary wit is generated and realised as will be demonstrated in the following chapter which focuses on the analysis of literary wit within the seventeenth-century drama, poetry and prose.

3. MANIFESTATIONS OF WIT IN THE 17TH CENTURY ENGLISH LITERARY WORKS

This chapter of the thesis proceeds with an explication of the methods and procedures of the research into the exploration of the literary wit in the selected works of the seventeenth-century English literature. As far as the analysis is concerned, several considerations had to be taken into account which are worth presenting. The first consideration was the selection of the literary material from the seventeenth-century English literature. It was necessary to establish the criteria by which literary works may be chosen for the analysis. As the thesis seeks to reveal English literary wit at its apogee it was decided that this should be demonstrated by the witty discourse that was created by the most prominent authors of the time. Thus, the full value of the seventeenth-century English witty eloquence is recovered from the recognised texts that have been acclaimed in various anthologies as the key texts of the seventeenth-century English literary canon. The decision was made to work from various specimen texts towards an understanding of how the conventions of literary wit have been established and how decoding occurs through an act of artistic communication between the reader/interpreter, the author, the literary text, and its context.

The second consideration was to distinguish what literary genres should be analysed. Contrary to the majority of literary mechanisms, literary wit seems to stay in the periphery of the literary genre categorisation. Moreover, it is also flexible enough and may be expressed both in forms of prose and poetry. As the dissertation seeks to reveal the cases of a divergent expressive mechanisms of literary wit, the analysis involves various genres and forms.

The third consideration was to discern an operational definition for the term *literary wit*. As there is a great deal of diverse and sometimes conflicting definitions of wit, and the term itself seems to be rather unstable due to its constantly shifting meaning, the theoretical insights of several previously discussed scholars were united into a workable definition of literary wit to be applied in the analysis of the selected seventeenth-century English literary works. Thus, in this thesis *literary wit* denotes an artistic expression directly connected with the human faculty of sense which is swift, eloquent, ingenious and inventive in its nature; it favours incongruous congruity, causing surprise and fostering pleasurable aesthetic effects with regard to intellectual gratification. It should also be noted that though there are scholars who consider wit to be a subset of humour, the author of this dissertation does not

confine the use of the term to a humorous domain only, extending broader possibilities for its expression in artistic discourse.

The fourth consideration was to define the categories to be explored in the study of literary wit. Relying on the theoretical assumptions discussed above, several categories were selected and found fitting for the analysis, namely, the modes, devices and functions of wit. Establishing these categories enabled the author of this thesis to answer what characteristic modes, functions and devices of literary wit the English writers of the seventeenth-century invoke in their literary oeuvre. However, the length requirements and the scope of the dissertation did not allow to perform an exhaustive analysis of all the selected works in the light of all three categories mentioned above. Hence, it was settled to explore the modes of wit in the selected dramatic pieces and examine the devices of wit within the selected poetry, while functions of wit will be investigated in the selected works of prose.

The fifth consideration was to designate the method of analysis of the selected texts and representing literary wit. In this research the following procedures were applied: the key authors and their literary works were singled out. Then the selected texts were carefully read in order to distinguish the instances of literary wit; after that, the expressions of literary wit were analysed taking into consideration how they operate individually and on the larger context of the entire literary text and its context. Finally, their particular modes, functions and devices were established also bearing in mind the socio-communicative functions of witty utterances as artistic texts. It should be mentioned that the spelling of the selected literary works followed the form of the source-text. After having discussed the methods and procedures of the empirical analysis, it is possible to continue the analysis of English seventeenth-century literary wit starting with its manifestation in drama.

3.1. Witty discourse in the seventeenth-century drama

The landscape of the seventeenth-century cultural, social and political life was very diverse and literary fashions were also experiencing changes over the years. Thus, in order to investigate the dramatic wit several plays from different time intervals of the seventeenth-century were selected for the analysis. Preference was given to the creative works of writers who are commonly established as the key figures of the century under consideration. It should be noted however that in some cases the authorship of a particular drama is disputable since the practice of authorial collaboration was prevailing at the time.

Different drama the genres (i.e. tragedy, comedy, parody, satirical and masque plays) were purposefully taken for research to carry a more thorough analysis of dramatic literary wit. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (c. 1607 published in 1613) by Francis Beumont, which is considered to be the first English parody; and one of the most acclaimed tragedies, *The Duchess of Malfi* (c. 1612-1613 published in 1623) by John Webster were selected as representatives of the Jacobean period (1603 – 1625). The former attempt is a parody aimed at two Jacobean plays in particular, i.e. Thomas Haywood's *The Prentices of London* (1592) and Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1600). Beaumont drew on the textual material, themes and characters of these plays to create a witty parody of the growing middle-class and its enthusiasm towards romance and adventure themes to be represented in dramas. The notion of 'middle-class culture' with regard to Jacobean audiences should be understood as "an inflexible relationship between status and attitude, rather than the large measure shared or analogous beliefs and tastes characterising Englishmen of all classes in the first decade of the seventeenth century" (Zitner 2004, 24). The wit of this play is based on references to other authors (e.g. Miguel de Cervantes, Thomas Haywood and Thomas Dekker), sexual innuendos and social satire. It reflects not only the cultural context of the seventeenth-century England but also highlights the important shifts in the attitudes towards the existing literary tradition.

The latter play, *The Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster is considered to be one of the greatest tragedies of the English late Renaissance. The playwright's greatness resides in his power to create a dark poetic vision with the help of witty extravagant rhetoric. As a dramatist, Webster has a distinct individual style and a specific emotional view of the world. The dramatic language reveals his "desire to discover the general rule that particular instance illustrates and the delight of enunciating it"[46]. Webster was 'addicted' to this practice and towards their close his plays become a string of passionate Baroque generalisations, usually about life and death. Moreover, he felt the need for broad moralising as he had a natural taste for sentstious eloquence and wit that revealed the solidity and immensity of his mind.

But what is really important in relation to wit is Webster's manner of unique composition. The dramatist has been known for citing a good many lines and phrases from his own works and from other playwrights. His plays, including *The Duchess of Malfi*, are notably proverbial. Charles Crawford

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[46]   BROOKE, R. (1916). *John Webster and the Elizabethan Drama.* Available at: http://www.archive.org/stream/johnwebstereliza00broorich/johnwebstereliza00bro orich_djvu.txt

wrote a collection of papers[47] (1906) tracing John Webster's borrowings from Michael de Montaigne, John Marston, Philip Sidney and John Donne. According to him, Webster's wit was formed from a long series of notes, carefully prepared beforehand, which he has masterfully scattered throughout his writings:

> They stand [Webster's notes] out from the rest of his work, and are easily recognized. In old writings such sentences are often marked by a hand in the margin, to denote that they are worthy of more than passing consideration; or they might be put between inverted commas, to emphasize their wit and wisdom. Sometimes they are brought in very awkwardly, and do not harmonize with surrounding matter; and sometimes the speakers follow up their wise saws by remarks which indicate very plainly that they are conscious of having given utterance to something beyond the common. But, whether awkwardly introduced or otherwise, these notes, whether cast into the form of proverbs or shaped to rime, stand out from the text and rivet one's attention[48].

From this it follows that Webster knew very well that literary wit was not meant for mere decorativeness but for engaging the readers or spectators into sophisticated and original dramatic discourse. To achieve it, the dramatist carefully examined the rhythms, phrases and speech turns in his dramas. His witty expressions denote the ideas within a radiant atmosphere. The playwright's note-book habit does not resemble the ready rhetoric pertaining more to his well-thought-out composition manner, in which he unconsciously transferred all the borrowed ideas in harmony with his own personality. To rely on Brooke, "Webster weaves in his quotations extraordinary well, they become part of the texture of the play adding richness of hue and strength of fabric"[49]. What is also peculiar to Webster's fondness for sententious repetition is that he disperses witty remarks to all the characters in the play thus abandoning the principle of a single leading character, no matter whether the title refers to one individual as it is in the case of *The Duchess of Malfi*, where the Duchess is the only one who suffers a tragedy. In fact, this play is built upon the complex interaction between all the characters. Charles F. Forker explains it in his book *The Skull Beneath the Skin: The Achievement of John Webster*:

> The diffusion of interest makes it possible for Webster to dramatize the psychic isolation of the individual in the group and to show that claustrophobic

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[47] CRAWFORD, C. (1906). *Collectanea*. Available at: http://archive.org/stream/collectaneastds01crawgoog#page/n6/mode/2up

[48] ibid.

[49] BROOKE, R. (1916). *John Webster and the Elizabethan Drama.* Available at: http://www.archive.org/stream/johnwebstereliza00broorich/johnwebstereliza00broorich_djvu.txt

closeness and cosmic loneliness may be aspects of each other. <...> the relational emphasis to characterization suggests the importance of social and family cohesion through the very denial of it. A coordinate theme here is the breakdown of language as an instrument of communication. Webster's famous penchant for equivocation, at the surface level a device of wit, forges an important link between the spoken word (the medium of drama) and human responsibility in both the smaller and larger units of society (1986, 490).

Webster's plays are suffused with literary wit which involves various shades of meaning. In fact, the understanding of his witty expressions is primarily linked to the understanding and interpretation of Websterian drama as such since wit is an essential projection of the dramatist's creative mind.

For the Caroline era (1625–1649), John Fletcher's comedy *Wit Without Money* (c. 1614 published in 1639) was selected for an investigation. Fletcher one of the most prolific and influential playwrights of his day collaborated with many dramatists (e.g. Frances Beaumont, Philip Massinger, Thomas Middleton, William Shakespeare and others) and worked for the King's Men company. The author seems to have favoured comedy as his genre; at least he is best known for it. His comedies are noted for their urban atmosphere, stylistic grace, use of irony and ingenious wit.

During the Interregnum of England (1649–1660) the theatres were closed; therefore, this particular period is underrepresented by the prominent dramas. Two plays, namely, the satirical play *The Rehearsal* (1671) by George Villiers, second Duke of Buckingam and the comedy *The Country Wife* (1675) by William Wycherley epitomize the Restoration period. Both playwrights were court wits and participated in the circle "Merry Gang" named so by a Metaphysical poet Andrew Marvell (Milne 2014, 59). Its other members were John Wilmot (1647-1680), Sir Charles Sedley, John Sheffield (1639-1701), Charles Sackville (1643-1706), George Etherege (1635-1692), Henry Jermyn (1605-1684) and Harry Killigrew (1528-1603) (ibid.). All of them had several things in common: they were "men of wit, poetry and favourites of Charles II" whose social life "involved women, wine and wit" (ibid.).

George Villiers was perhaps one of the most controversial figures in the Restoration political and literary scene. His play *Rehearsal*, which was extremely popular among his contemporaries, just proves the point by mocking heroic tragedies in general and Dryden in particular. The playwright was known as "a man blessed with considerable intelligence" which he had probably acquired in the court where he was raised together with the royal family of Charles I (Thomas 1978, 85). Villiers "had not only a lively wit and perspicacity, but also the ability to express pithily what he had observed" (ibid.). His idea to write this satire was instigated by Dryden's play *The*

Conquest of Granada (1672). In its prologue the writer expresses his criticism of the dramatists and their works:

> *I'll write a Play, says one, for I have got*
> *A broad-brim'd hat, and wastbelt tow'rds a Plot.*
> *Sayes t'other, I have one more large than that:*
> *Thus they out-write each other with a hat.*
> *The brims still grew with every Play they writ;*
> *And grew so large, they cover'd all the wit.*[50]

Here the dramatist encourages creating different plays which would contain moral characters with strong principles and well-balanced dialogues of noble sentiments. *Rehearsal* is aimed at Dryden, his overly pompous style and swelling oratory of his plays. This satire also received attention from Dryden who based his character Zimri on Valliers in his satire *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681).

It seems that a libertine or rake life that "Merry Gang" was so fond of found its reflection in Wycherley's writings as well. His comedy *The Country Wife* (1675) is certainly the case. The main character is Harry Horner who is a notorious womaniser and a man of acerbic wit. The comedy is built on the play *Eunuchus* by the Roman dramatist Terence. What prompts the action in the play is witty dialogues that showcase "an intense competition based on male sexual rivalry" (Corns 2007, 343). Yet, contrary to the earlier comedies of Jonson or Fletcher, which aimed to improve the morale of the society, Wycherley's plays do not try to educate through an example of characters. The playwright criticises his society and the characters in the plays of his contemporaries but he does not separate himself from what he is portraying, claiming instead that there is, in fact, "an alternative or privileged perspective" (Owen 2002, 49). Hence, being immoral is just another way of looking into the world. Thus, literary wit in all of the above mentioned plays embraces a wide range of subjects and reveals different attitudes towards literature, politics, social system and gender roles to be discussed in the proceeding subchapter in greater detail.

In theatrical communication the dramatic information is conveyed to the readers and/or viewers through a particular structure of a play's texture or a performance on the stage. It should be noted here that even though the whole spectacle could be treated as the complex of phenomena associated with the

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[50] DRYDEN, J. *The Conquest of Granada*. Available at the Early English Books online (hereafter EEBO):
http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A36610.0001.001/1:5?c=eebo;c=eebo2;g=eebo group;rgn=div1;view=fulltext;xc=1;q1=The+Conquest+of+Granada

performer-audience interaction which could be analysed as semiotic transaction, this thesis focuses only on the dramatic text. It means that drama in the following sections denotes a type of fiction created for a stage demonstration and constructed in accordance with particular dramatic conventions (Elam 2002, 1). In this respect, a play is perceived as a macro-sign which can be broken down into smaller meaningful semiotic units for the analysis of literary wit.

Following this framework, it is possible to regard wit as a mark of artistically and culturally signified dramatic discourse. Hence, witty discourse is further investigated as an intentional sign which is applied by the playwrights to draw the attention of the readers to the cultural, moral and social values of the semiosphere when a particular play was composed. The theatrical exchange which involves the playwright, his dramatic text, its context and the reader becomes possible when the reader's semiotic intuition accepts the possibility that particular structures within a dramatic text are significant, thus they need to be decoded and interpreted according to the dramatic and cultural codes at his disposal. This means that for the literary wit to be perceived as a bearer of semiotic meaning the reader must make a presumption of its semioticity. Only then an artistic communication as a form of semiotic exchange may be established. It should be stressed that witty discourse is characterised by its peculiar construction which involves distinct modes of expression. The selected seventeenth-century selected dramas provide substantial investigative materials and invoke various modes of wit which are going to be explored in the following sections taking into account the socio-communicative functions of the text.

3.1.1. Repartee and quip

As the analysis has shown the seventeenth-century English dramas abound in **repartees** which is the most prevalent mode of dramatic wit. It is a swift and sharp reply aiming to outshine the former speaker's utterance by showcasing one's ingenuity, and frequently, though not always, by degrading the other participant of the verbal exchange. The dominance of this mode is mainly determined by the fact that plays are based more on dialogic or interactive literary language which is needed in order to construct witty retorts, the core of repartees. No doubt, dialogues could also be employed in poetry and prose, yet in them repartees are not as common. It should be noted that the stage props in those days were quite scarce; thus the playwrights took on themselves a hard task of creating a virtual reality by employing witty language with the utmost literary skill. This means that the plays were dependent on creative

eloquence to move the action forward and entertain the spectators with picturesque word-battles. To do that the authors used swift successions of repartees that would dazzle the audience and at the same time make the dialogue more agile. It becomes clear why Dryden states that repartee is "the very soul of conversation"[51]. By examining various cases of repartee this section describes the ways in which literary wit serves to convey the language of contest, often resulting in aggression and giving particular attention to the sexualized slander and open mockery.

The playwrights frequently apply the conflictual model of verbal interaction in which "the spoken word often carries dramatic weight just through becoming an entity in its own right. Launched into the air, the spoken word can be fought over, marred, remade, juggled with, or buried, thrown back at speakers with changed force" (Gross 2001, 200). Hence any word can be turned into "a prop, a tool, a weapon" in order to showcase a dark wit (ibid.). Repartees are invoked by the playwrights to disclose certain issues of their society, mock at someone, express sexual aggression or, on the contrary, sexual attraction. For instance, in John Webster's play *The Duchess of Malfi* wit exposes moral corruption and restless pursuit of political and social justice. In his plays, the playwright explores the problem of power in the sexual context. Here, wit acquires the elements of contempt and malice that are used as a weapon directed against another subject. It is worth maintaining that in the Jacobean society, the gendering of power was a relevant theme or culturally-bound code, having in mind that the pattern of monarchy changed from the Queens' rule to the King's rule.

Wit by itself deeply implicates the puzzling questions of sex, sexuality, power and dominance. It is not only the matter of quick turns of a phrase or intellectual domination but of sexual mastery where a dominant male speaker verbally controls a female subject. Thus, Webster's wit, as expressed in sensuous and intricate images, is also a wit of control. However, since the atmosphere of corruption is spread through several contexts in the play it is not always clear who is corrupting whom – whether the speaker is attacking his rival or victim, or is being corrupted by his own wit. As Gabriel Rieger observes, "the target has vice, and the attacker appropriates the language of vice" (2009, 58). Thus, the corruptive language of sexualized wit is a powerful but double-edged rhetorical weapon. Among such cases is Bosola's encounter

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[51] DRYDEN, J. *An Evening's Love*. Available at EEBO:
http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A36622.0001.001/1:3?ALLSELECTED=1;c=e
ebo;c=eebo2;g=eebogroup;rgn=div1;singlegenre=All;sort=occur;subview=detail
;type=simple;view=fulltext;xc=1;q1=An+Evening+s+love

with the passing Old Lady. Bosola is a malcontent who serves as a spy for the brothers (the Cardinal and Ferdinand) of the Duchess and eventually kills her. His remarks on the innocent Old Lady's looks are worth considering since they reveal especially cynical wit:

BOSOLA: *You come from painting now?*
OLD LADY: *From what?*

> BOSOLA: *Why, from your scurvy face-physic.*
> *To behold thee not painted inclines somewhat near*
> *A miracle. These in thy face here were deep ruts*
> *And foul sloughs the last progress.*
> *There was a lady in France that, having the small-pox,*
> *Flay'd the skin off her face to make it more level;*
> *And whereas before she looked like a nutmeg grater,*
> *After she resembled an abortive hedgehog.*[52]
> (Act II, Scene i, lines 25-34)

Bosola uses his acerbic wit against the Old Lady who, in his opinion, is of disreputable character and possibly infected with a venereal disease. He starts by enquiring whether the Old Lady has returned from the painting by which he implies that she has applied heavy cosmetics on her face. When his victim gets confused by such a question and asks for an explanation, Bosola expands on his criticism. He despises her visage for being wrinkled and hyperbolically puts emphasis on the state of wrinkles calling them deep trenches and filthy swamp which no cosmetics can conceal. It should be noted that Bosola's lashing against the Old Lady is not consequential (the character is just passing by) but rather strategically planned by the playwright as a chance to demonstrate the character's biting wit.

Here the function of witty utterances is to attack and mock since Old Lady's face by degraded it to the level of mere filth or even perhaps excrements, as stinking alley with sewage pipes or as Rieger notes "as a cesspool, a repository of common filth and ordure" (2009, 63). While expressing his revulsion for the Old Lady's looks, Bosola draws upon the conventional Renaissance code of associating cosmetics with disease in order to attack the Old Lady as a whore. As Shirley Nelson Garner notes in her paper *'Let Her Paint as Inch Thick': Painted Ladies in Renaissance Drama and Society*, in England "cosmetics were ubiquitous among the whores in the

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[52] WEBSTER, J. *The Duchess of Malfi*. Available at Project Gutenberg: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2232/2232-h/2232-h.htm

theatre district south of the Thames because cosmetics could hide, and in some cases spackle, syphilitic lesions" (1989, 133). Thus, heavy make-up stands as a sign of illness and by suggesting that the Old Lady has come from "painting", Bosola hints that her paints are also related with whoredom and disease. The advanced stage of venereal disease is evident in his reference to the "last progress" leading to a cruel joke about the French lady who resembled "a nutmeg grater" and an "abortive hedgehog" (lines 31-34). The former comparison appeals to the quality of the skin alluding that it is uneven, wrinkled as well as dark drown as the remains of shredded nutmeg on the grater which resemble dirty, coarse and flaky skin. The latter provides a gruesome picture of the Old Lady's face as an unformed foetus which is skinless, formless, lacking all human features, i.e. eyes, nose and mouth. Hence, human face is compared to a commodity and undeveloped animal offspring. The discourse on make-up is developed into witty utterances to express a bitter attack and attempt at humiliation. The allusion to a French lady helps to see how the Old Lady looks like.

Bosola does not stop at degrading the Old Lady. When she enquires what exactly he meant by "painting", he debases her in decidedly grotesque terms:

OLD LADY: *Do you call this painting?*
BOSOLA: *No, no, but you call careening of an old*
morphewed lady to make her disembogue again –
there's roughcast phrase to your plastic.[53]

<div align="right">(Act II, Scene i, lines 35-38)</div>

It seems that Bosola is deliberately obscure in concealing the true meaning of his words. His code-thick language is labyrinthine and difficult to be deciphered by the Old Lady. He continues disgracing the woman by describing her as if she were an old ship whose rotting hull should be turned on the side so that a crew might scrape the barnacles off a ship before it could depart. With the implication of cruelty and violence, the images that the author uses in Bosola's speech have a dehumanising character and reflect lowest humiliation. Her portrayal is reduced to the level of inanimation when she is compared to a sewer, a grater or an old ship in order to discredit her. Bosola enacts her degradation by mordant wit which functions here as a verbal weapon.

It is important to stress that although he attacks the Old Lady with his harsh witticisms she is not his true target as Webster's sardonic wit first and

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[53] WEBSTER, J. *The Duchess of Malfi*. Available at Project Gutenberg: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2232/2232-h/2232-h.htm

foremost addressed to his contemporary society. According to Annette Drew-Bear, "the painted face both in society and on the stage was seen in moral terms" (1994, 13). Hence the painted face is perceived as a cunning disguise of one's immoral nature. By employing witty responses regarding painting and physiognomy the author offers his standpoint concerning moral principles. In Webster's play the pained face the Old Lady stands as a culturally driven sign of hypocrisy, corruption and sinfulness of court, community and of Bosola himself.

Dramatic discourse can be understood as systemised and personalised employed means of artistic communication which invokes the specific instrumentality of literary wit in transmitting a semiospheric vision from the playwright, or the addresser to the reader as addressee. The reader is included into a theatrical semiosis when he interprets and decodes witty utterances. The communicative relationship between the characters in the given play is expanded as it also involves the reader as a participant who picks up the signals of literary wit and converts them into meaningful messages. Every message, in its turn, conveys information which acts as new knowledge shared by the author with the reader. As, for instance, the cosmetics which in modern-times is related to beauty, in the seventeenth century might also have negative implications. This means that while decoding a dramatic text, the reader broadens his intellectual horizons. At the same time, he increases that information with his intellectual input thus creating the transaction of information.

It should be noted that new contexts open up new possibilities of informational polyphony as wit in dramas is very dynamic. It can transform and produce various meanings depending on the context. Hence it can be "a dangerous weapon, even to the possessor, if he knows not how to use it discreetly"[54]. While in the given example the playwright uses the imagery of disease to link together Bosola's language of sex with that of violence and anger, the attacker is in a way corrupted and consumed by the attack he deploys. From this it follows that he is both the attacker and the victim of his own aggressive wit. The Old Lady's decay is revealed through Bosola's accusing witticisms, yet his humiliating and wounding claims against her disclose him being not perfect either, only committing other sins. Here the attacker attempts to show another person as badly infected but exposes himself through his corrupting verbal power of aggression. It reflects an important

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[54]   MONTAIGNE, M. *Essays of Michael de Montaigne*. Available at Project Gutenberg: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3600/3600-h/3600-h.htm

aspect of the persiflage wit meaning that the one who uses it can never be morally safe.

Webster also employs repartees which embrace several contexts combined together in this talk between the courtiers:

CASTRUCHIO: *How do you like my Spanish jennet?*
RODERIGO: *He is all fire.*
FERDINAND: *I am of Pliny's opinion, I think he was begot by the wind;*
He runs as if he were ballasted with quicksilver.
SILVIO: *True, my lord, he reels from the tilt often.*[55]

(Act I, Scene ii, lines 22-26)

A group of men speak about a small Spanish horse as they have recently been to the joustings. Building on each other's comments and competing for a better line, they construct a witty conversation that demonstrates both sexual and mythical patterns through which the dramatic meaning is created. Castrucio poses a simple question that is right away answered with an ironic line uttered by Roderigo who states that the horse is superb by likening it to fire. Ferdinand uses this line to make a contradiction by comparing the horse with the wind. He refers to Pliny's study of the horses delivered in his *Natural History* (AD 77–79) where he proposes that horses are impregnated with the wind[56]. To top his utterance Ferdinand invokes the mythical context. While stating that the horse is carrying quicksilver, i.e. mercury, he inventively alludes to god Mercury, a messenger of the gods and therefore very fast. The next turn comes from Silvio who agrees with Ferdinand but at the same time speculates on Roderigo's line with the sexual implication. While he seems to explain the fact that the horse is not trained properly to win the game as he runs away from the jousting ring, he also makes a sexual allusion to a person avoiding sexual intercourse.

The instances of repartees discussed above and some other cases of repartees that will be further explored (as repartees can also portray other modes of literary wit within them) are used to perform several dramatic functions. Repartees can be applied to attack or ridicule, as is evident in the examples discussed given above. Yet, they can also be applied for defence, though, in the analysed plays, it was done by the interlocutor himself rather than the third party. Repartees are also employed to establish a friendly

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[55] WEBSTER, J. *The Duchess of Malfi*. Available at Project Gutenberg: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2232/2232-h/2232-h.htm

[56] PLINY. *Natural History*. Available at: http://penelope.uchicago.edu/holland/index.html

atmosphere. In such cases, an amicable contest of words is observed. There were several cases of repartees that highlighted some important point. Finally, the multiple cases of repartees involving flirting have been distinguished, some of which will be analysed in section 4.1.3. However, before that, another prevailing mode of literary wit, i.e. quip needs to be discussed.

Quips that the selected plays involve reflect several semiospheric systems of the seventeenth century. They signal to a complex political situation, social status, gender roles, professions, love and infidelity, life and death. Quips demonstrate the fusion of thought and feeling, of intellect blended with sensual experience. Hence, they are mostly Metaphysical. According to A. J. Smith, the distinctive Metaphysical wit of the seventeenth century "focuses on interest in the rendering of our ambiguous state when sensation and idea interfuse in the language itself, opening an absolute consequence in the momentary encounter and registering the shock of metaphysical predicaments posed in the play of the senses" (2006, xi). The instances of the Metaphysical quips are distinct in the dramatic texture due to their complexity and richness. Consider the following extract from Bosola's speech to the Duchess before her death:

BOSOLA: *Observe my meditation now:*
What thing is in this outward form of man
To be belov'd? We account it ominous
If nature do produce a colt, or lamb,
A fawn, or goat, in any limb resembling
A man, and fly from't as a prodigy.
Man stands amaz'd to see his deformity
In any other creature but himself.
But in our own flesh, though we bear diseases
Which have their true names only ta'en from beasts,
As the most ulcerous wolf and swinish measle;
Though we are eaten up of lice and worms,
And though continually we bear about us
A rotten and dead body, we delight
To hide it in rich tissue; all our fear,
Nay all our terror, is, lest our physician
Should put us in the ground, to be made sweet.[57]

(Act II, Scene i, lines 45-61)

[57] WEBSTER, J. *The Duchess of Malfi*. Available at Project Gutenberg: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2232/2232-h/2232-h.htm

The quip makes this artistic discourse unexpected and uncommon. Harsh wit forces the reader to take note of the utterance and shift his perspective by deautomising the reader's view towards death. The meditation on death confronts him with the loathsome reality of the process of natural decay after death. Bosola discusses the bestiality of man by stating that although men envision themselves as better species they tend to bear the same diseases as beasts. Nevertheless, they care about their external looks covering the aging and sick body in rich clothes to hide their inner corruption. Here wit is built on the basis of pun of the noun 'tissue'[58] meaning paper and epidermis, since, actually, it is the skin that covers the muscles and the interior organs thus hiding inner spiritual state.

Men do not wish to have things in common with animals or beasts and they are apt to give to human diseases such names that are associated with animals and beasts pretending as if their own bodies would not get rotten and die. The playwright alludes to cancer caused by the lupus disease (which is the Latin for 'wolf') or suffer from swine-pox related to pigs: "ulcerous wolf and swinish measle" (line 55). He gives a Baroque parody of the Renaissance treatment of man as a paragon of nature, "a prodigy" (line 50). Man is full of pride and does not want to recognise the temporality of his existence and deformity of his body. Instead he is inclined to find these qualities in other natural creatures ignoring the fact that animals and beasts serve as a mirror, as obvious signs pointing to man's own deformity. To some extent, man is seen as a creature standing on a lower level than other living beings because the latter do not deceive themselves. As Rieger maintains, "human life in this extended speech is constructed as a corruption, a vile thing that is not even properly bestial because it is below the level of beasts" (2009, 63). Bosola's witty quip conveys the absurdity of human condition and challenges the reader to think about the temporality of his life. Wit is a sign which highlights that decoding of a particular message requires the reader to be open to a diverse range of interpretational possibilities.

Wit can be hostile to the common sense of man. The author shocks the reader into awareness that a living body is but a walking grave: "we bear about us / A rotten dead body" (lines 57-58). Such gruesome wit serves to intensify the sensual effect. The conception of a decaying body, with the naturalistic

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58 According to the *Free Dictionary Online* (available at: https://www.thefreedictionary.com/tissue+displaceability) the word 'tissue' refers to: A fine, very thin fabric, such as gauze. And in biology means a part of an organism consisting of a large number of cells having a similar structure and function: connective tissue; nerve tissue.

elements such as sucking human blood lice and worms eating up the body, may put the reader in the state of disgust and shock and this is the desired effect. Moreover, Bosola remarks that human flesh is foul, morbid and loathsome and, therefore, death may open up a much more preferable state than that of earthy life. Webster works out his highly personalised witty discourse to convey the conflict between man's outward appearance carefully looked after and his neglected inner spiritual state through similar to Metaphysical imagery. Thus, the parasites, i.e. lice and worms also acquire an emblematic grotesque semiotic significance – they point to vices and sins devouring the spiritual body of entire man.

This wit also has the Biblical connotation of Job's situation when he proclaims: "And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God"[59]. In the analysed excerpt of the drama, death is viewed as a grotesque physician that will summon his nurses – the worms to devour the dead body as sweet food which is, as Bosola claims, "all our fear / Nay all our terror" (lines 58-59). This quip exposes the ludicrous by diminishing the status of the living flesh as stained and infected. On the other hand, in his particular way, he honours the dead body that will resurrect for eternal life which the animals and beasts will not undergo.

Bosola's meditation concerns all humanity, not excluding himself. He is dissatisfied with his own life. The motif of self-loathing is expressed through a larger engagement with the witty imagery of bodily contempt. This is evident in the following quip about the nature of human body which Bosola addresses to the Duchess some moments before her death:

BOSOLA: *Thou art a box of worm-seed, at best but a salvatory*
Of green mummy. What's this flesh? A little cruded milk
Fantastical puff-paste. Our bodies are weaker than those
Paper prisons boys use to keep flies in; more contemptible,
Since ours is to preserve earth-worms. Didst thou ever see
A lark in a cage? Such is the soul in the body. This world
Is like her little turf of grass, and the heaven o'er our heads,
Like her looking-glass, only gives us a miserable knowledge
Of the small compass of our prison.[60]

(Act IV, Scene ii, lines 123-131)

[59] JOB 19:26. Available at BibleGateway:
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Job+19%3A26&version=KJV
[60] WEBSTER, J. *The Duchess of Malfi*. Available at Project Gutenberg:
https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2232/2232-h/2232-h.htm

Indeed, Webster's wit is an exercise of an artistic invention where the combination of the absurd and the ludicrous is evoked consciously. In his dexterous manoeuvres the playwright conflates two expressions of wit in Bosola's speech. By enlarging upon the abomination of a human being he reduces man to a bestial artefact of a box with earth-worms, the ones that the body will be finally destroyed by.

Moreover, he compares the body of the Duchess to a "salvatory of green mummy" (line 124) at best, i.e. a case for holding human remains yet unmummified. Richard Sugg explains that such wit "offers a sharply pitchy glance at the medical exploitation of human beings, presenting them not as holistic individuals, but as medicine-in-waiting, a kind of generalised crop, ripening suitably only in death" (2011, 210). Bosola does not stop at this and augments his contempt for physical body through the imagery of "cruded milk" and "puff-paste" once again underscoring the idea of how spoilt and unwholesome the living flesh is.

To emphasize the weakness of the human body the author gives an original and impressive parallel between the body and a paper prison for flies with which Jacobean boys used to play. The paper box is a prison to the flies which do not destroy it but rather die in it. Human body is the living box which stores "worm-seeds" meaning that it breeds worms which eventually devour it. The image of the fly alludes to vices and sins since flies breed worms which feed on the dead flesh as it rots and its texture becomes similar to clabber or thick cream.

Webster expands the view that human soul is held captive in the body as a "lark in a cage" (line 128). Thus, the body is regarded as a prison. Man feels imprisoned in the cramped space of earthy existence, when a relatively wide world is viewed as a "little turf of grass" and eternal life as unreachable as heaven is to an encaged lark. Heaven is compared to the mirror which, instead of reflecting the signs of the paradisiacal state to evoke hope, provides a man with "miserable knowledge" (line 130) of how narrow the space of a bodily prison is. The image of a mirror has several semiotic functions. It enables a man to see himself and at the same time presents a reflection as a dialogue with himself and provokes a high degree of autocommunication. The mirror shows how much soul is dependent on the bodily demands. Soul is viewed as a prisoner. Little turf is under the body's feet, or the foundation of the prison. What it as a prisoner sees through the window is a small piece of heaven framed by the window as limitations.

The inquiry of the play is focussed on the body in its inwardness and outwardness in a witty manner. The Metaphysical quip suggests that bodies in their animated form are impure and corrupt therefore the processes of decay

after physical death is necessary for the bodily purification in resurrection. It is evident that such dense wit with its extended comparisons and ingenious imagery is not a mere ornament or illustration: wit becomes a means of communicating the playwright's ideas and achieving new insights into the development of the motif of death in the given drama. Though Bosola's wit expresses a profound disgust with the body and its functions it also touches upon religious references revealing soul's wish to escape from the prison of physical flesh corrupted by sin. Humanity is prone to sin and err, therefore, by exhibiting a hideously deformed cosmos and human wickedness, Webster employs wit for didactic purposes as lessons on morality, especially emphasizing the consequences of sinful behaviour. The dramatist openly criticizes the sinners disregarding their rank or social status.

It could be stated that quips in particular enable not only the socio-communicative functions which evoke communication between the addresser and the addressee or the reader and cultural tradition, but also an intensive interaction between the text and the reader and even more so an interaction of the reader with himself. Since, while reading and decoding such quips as presented above, the reader meditates on his own subsistence. The gruesome images offered in quips are designed to shock or even repulse the reader. It is precisely this wit that mostly attracts attention and serves as a mediator in the reader's reflection of himself. This means that through witty texts the reader is able to examine his own beliefs and understand his inner state. Communicating with the witty discourse of the seventeenth-century and decoding its messages the reader/interpreter remodifies his former approach to his personal life and, therefore, is constantly changing himself and improving his spiritual and moral situation.

3.1.2. Overstatement and understatement

Further on other modes of wit discerned by Manson (1966), and Long and Graesser (2009) will be analysed with specific examples from the seventeenth-century plays. The example to illustrate the first mode of **overstatement** is taken from *Wit Without Money* by John Fletcher. In the play Shorthose and Humphrey, the two servants of the widow Lady Hartwel, are fuming that they have to take her out of town. Hence they discuss the evil things they wish to happen to their Lady for making them leave the town. When Humprey wishes that her bed be made out of wool-packs, Shorthose adds that they should be infected with swarms of fleas. Indeed, at that time fleas were common in household, clothing and bedding. Wool-packs as an organic material were certainly one of places they would breed since they could survive in them

during winter. But what causes surprise in this conversation is not their ill wishes concerning Lady Hartwel but an overstatement which is made in relation to fleas.

HUMPHREY: *No beds but Wool-Packs.*
SHORTHOSE: *And those so crammed with Warrens of starved Fleas that bite like Bandogs;[61]*

<div align="right">(Act III, Scene I)</div>

Here the author extends an exaggerated description of the fleas that are compared to bandogs in order to intensify the effect on the reader's imagination. Such witty overstatement requires some knowledge of specific cultural codes on the part of the reader as the bandog is not a regular pet but a representative of a specific breed implying that such dogs are extremely ferocious:

> BANDOG. Properly *band-dog*, or bound-dog. A dog always kept tied up on account of his fierceness, and with a view to increase that quality of him, which it certainly would do. <...> These were the dogs kept for baiting bears, when that amusement was in vogue: and therefore were probably the same as those by which bulls also were baited, the true old English bull-dogs, than which a dog of greater courage cannot exist (Nares 1867, 50).

Hence, with this overstatement the author enhances the biting quality of a small insect, i.e. the flea, by portraying it as a fierce fighting dog. The imagistic expression gives force to the expression and challenges the reader's assumptions about seemingly harmless insects. To decipher literary wit, the readers are urged to imagine a pack of bandogs and compare them to the fleas by projecting the former biting quality to the latter. This way dogs as objects from natural world turn into figurative units of this discourse content. The overstatement helps to evoke the extraordinary environment in the play and brings some humour to the situation. As a result, the reader is able to perceive the semiotic space of the message-transmitting characters.

Quite the opposite encoding mechanism of wit is **understatement**. An example of it from Webster's play *The Duchess of Malfi* presents wit which is applied to make something look less important than it actually is. Here Bosola, who lied and tormented the Duchess on the demand of her own brothers, has come to fulfil their last wish. Disguised as an executioner, he arrives to kill the Duchess but, while talking to her, he feels remorse and sympathizes with her suffering. As a consequence, he suggests to help her escape but, contrary to his expectations, receives her witty rejection:

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[61] FLETCHER, J. *Wit Without Money*. Available at Project Gutenberg: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/13425/13425-h/13425-h.htm

BOSOLA: *Come, be of comfort; I will save your life.*
DUCHESS: *Indeed I have not leisure to tend so small a business.*[62]

<div align="right">(Act IV, Scene i, lines 83-84)</div>

As can be seen from the excerpt above, instead of trying to save her life, the Duchess belittles its value by stating that life is such an insignificant matter that it should be simply disregarded and finished with. The understatement is used by the playwright to strengthen the effect of a deeply tragic scene. During her rebellion against her brothers the Duchess reveals a strong character but eventually is distressed to such an extent that she chooses death over life to end her spiritual agony. By deliberately representing her death as something of no importance the Duchess invokes ironic tone. With the witty response she shows her heroic valour and delivers a crushing blow to Bosola's corrupt consciousness. The reality constructed by the understatement is based on a violation of natural reaction to the situation when someone is in a life-and-death situation. However, as noted by Lotman, it is a feature of artistic texts to exhibit a greater freedom and make impossible seem possible. Another aspect of an artistic text which was stressed by the scholar and could be evidenced here is unpredictability. Certainly the response which the Duchess provides is unanticipated but it is natural since dramatic text is meant to be perceived as original rather than predictable.

3.1.3. Self-deprecation and teasing

Wit is a sign of mental and imaginative ability to produce utterances that disclose social and cultural tradition of the time. To quote Michelson, "wit is a weapon of ridicule, best used in enforcing separations between the lofty and the low—in a cultural moment when lofty and low were much clearer categories than they might be now" (2000, 19). Thus, the producers of socio-cultural wit become involved in an open competition for public images and power seeking to maximize their gains while protecting their status. Consider a case of **self-deprecation** in *The Duchess of Malfi* when Bosola compares himself with a horseleech:

BOSOLA: *He and his brother are like plum-trees that grow crooked*
over standing-pools; they are rich and o'erladen with fruit, but
none but crows, pies, and caterpillars feed on them.
Could I be one of their flattering panders,

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[62] WEBSTER, J. *The Duchess of Malfi*. Available at Project Gutenberg: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2232/2232-h/2232-h.htm

> *I would hang on their ears like a horseleech, till I were full, and*
> *then drop off.*
> *Who would rely upon these miserable dependences, in*
> *expectation to be advanced tomorrow?*
> *What creature ever fed worse than hoping Tantalus? Nor ever*
> *died any man more fearfully than he that hoped for a pardon[63].*
>
> <div align="right">(Act I, Scene i, lines 47-57)</div>

This elaborate simile combining two disparate images in an original and witty way makes a profound effect on the reader. The image of the plum-tree growing over "standing-pools" (line 48) representing Ferdinand and the Cardinal evokes a gruesome and repulsive atmosphere, especially when followed by the animalistic images of crows, pies and caterpillars feeding on their fruit. As William Miller agrees, "plants can become the vehicle for expressing horror and loathing of generation, of fecundity and fertility itself. Lush greenness can only easily pass from the basis for wealth, health, and well-being to disgust, rot, and nausea from surfeit" (1997, 42).

Webster's witty parallel echoes the insight of a Greek philosopher Diogenes Laertius (3rd century AD) found in the *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* where he compares the dissolute to "fig-trees growing upon a cliff: whose fruit is not enjoyed by any man, but is eaten by ravens and vultures" (2018, 61). The Jacobean author proposes a similar idea by stressing that the brothers have nothing good to offer to the society as they are just like fruit well-laden trees bending their branches over putrid and perhaps poisonous standing water. Hence, the harvest is unattainable to the righteous and only the scavengers and parasites can reach and use them. The image of stagnant water is in opposition to the earlier in a play expressed Antonio's description of French court which is compared to a drinking fountain that provides crystal-clear water. At the same time, it echoes his warning about a possibility of water being contaminated at the fountainhead.

ANTONIO: *Considering duly that a prince's court*
> *Is like a common fountain whence should flow*
> *Pure silver drops in general, but if't chance*
> *Some curs'd example poison't near the head,*
> *Death and diseases through the whole land spread.[64]*
>
> <div align="right">(Act I, Scene i, lines 11-15)</div>

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[63] WEBSTER, J. *The Duchess of Malfi*. Available at Project Gutenberg: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2232/2232-h/2232-h.htm

[64] WEBSTER, J. *The Duchess of Malfi*. Available at Project Gutenberg: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2232/2232-h/2232-h.htm

Antonio praises the behaviour of the prince in France and idealises his court but then turns to criticizing the courtly corruption of Italy. He skilfully compares the court to the public fountain that is used by regular people instead of exclusively by the court, thus stressing the importance of the ruler's decisions. If somebody poisons the fountain's water at its "head" the entire country might turn to be ill. The ruler as the Head of the Kingdom is wittily compared to the head of the fountain. Thus, it is suggested that the ruler's behaviour, either good or bad, inevitably influences the health of the entire country.

Hence, by introducing the political context of France, Antonio accentuates the problem of corruption in the Italian court of Malfi where two Aragonian brothers Ferdinand and Cardinal reign. However, while Antonio is only anticipating what might happen, since he has just returned to Italy and is not aware of the actual situation at court; Bosola enlightens that a condition has been horrid for some time and is progressing as the image of standing water implies. Thus, Ferdinand and Cardinal as plum trees flourish surrounded by the poisonous standing water which engenders predatory parasites such as horseleeches.

This excerpt broadens the understanding of the social environment of the period informing the reader that only those who help the brothers in their greed for power are the sole recipients of the reward. Bosola questions whether he should become one of the brothers' sycophants. The author introduces this idea by Bosola's speculation of how to behave. He imaginatively treats panders as horseleeches. The grotesque imagery is worked out in the excerpt by Bosola's self-deprecating envisioning of himself as a parasitic worm feeding on human blood while hanging on their ears until it is full and ready to drop off just like an overripe plum. However, Bosola quickly rejects this idea by identifying himself with the Greek mythical Tantalus. The mythologized image of Bosola has a mnemonic effect on the reader who attempts to retrieve the mythical cues in the context of the witty utterance, decode it and perceive an association which leads to generation of new meaningful information. In order to do that the reader needs to recall the myth about Tantalus who wants to deceive gods by making them act the way they would never act and would be ashamed of anyone knowing about it. This way Tantalus would prove that he is smarter than any god. Thus, he invites gods to a feast and serves them his own son Pelops whom he has killed and boiled. However, Gods foresee Tantalus' plan, they restore Pelops to life and punish his father by casting him into the Underworld. There he is condemned to eternal hunger and thirst. He has to stand in a lake that rises up, but as soon as

he wants to take a gulp it recedes, just like the trees that grow near him bearing fruits that Tantalus can never taste since the branches lift up immediately (Kirk 2005, 48-49).

According to Lotman, mythological texts can act as a stimulant of memory which provokes autocommunication by making the reader converse with himself, moreover, they are capable of preserving the model of universe or a certain worldview of the addresser (1990, 152-153). Every semiotic system is a model which explains the world; myths belong to a secondary modelling system which helps the readers to understand the world in a specific way. Hence, it is applied purposefully as a schema for organising playwright's message to the reader. Using it as an example of his present state, Bosola reveals his desperation for the brothers' favour that is hard or even impossible to achieve. Hence, the primary encoding is realised by identifying Bosola's situation with mythological one and the character from the play with mythical Tantalus.

It should be maintained that the author's endeavour to show incongruous wit in this passage has an intense effect. The images of caterpillars and horseleeches evoke the feeling of disgust but what really produces it is the ripeness of fruit. The playwright paints the picture of the plum-trees with thick vegetation that is so eagerly devoured by the parasites and vultures that cannot really care whether it is the plums or rotting flesh. Hence, the animalistic imagery is inventively and logically combined with the plant imagery. As Miller claims:

> Humans, albeit flattering panders, become horseleeches, who state themselves to death falling like overripe plums down into the ooze. And the imaginistic circle comes full round when the horseleech dropping off like a plum from its host turns plums into figurative horseleeches that leech from the tree. The passage, however, does not pretend to be a description of nature but of corrupt and vicious humans. Surfeit and gross feeding, sucking blood, leech-infested ponds, these are tropes for moral and social corruption (1997, 43).

Thus the extract from the drama reveals corruption in the court which is the epicentre of all the rigours, but at the same time portrays a case of self-deprecation in relation to social class.

Repartee, as one of the most common modes of literary wit in a dramatic discourse, does not necessarily need to be used in order to attack an opponent of the conversation or top him/her with even more ingenious reply, sometimes it is used in quite provocative manner of **teasing**. This is especially evident in the scenes that involve female and male characters. In such cases wit becomes a flirtatious game which frequently employs sexual references. Consider the example from Fletcher's play *Wit Without Money*:

ISABELLA: *Are you in earnest Sir, do you long to be hang'd?*
FRANCISCO: *Yes by my troth Lady in these fair Tresses.*
ISABELLA: *Shall I call out for help?*
FRANCISCO: *No by no means, that were a weak trick Lady, I'le kiss, and*
stop your mouth.
ISABELLA: *You'l answer all these?*
FRANCISCO: *A thousand kisses more.*[65]

(Act V, Scene I)

Isabella, who is in love with Francisco, decides to send him a purse filled with money. Though it is done in secret, Francisco is able to figure out who is his undisclosed patron. He tries to thank Isabella but she is too timid to admit that it was her, more so that she is in love with him. However, Francisco is persistent to get to the bottom of it when he secretly approaches Isabella on her way to the church. Isabella is worried that her sister Lady Hartwell might do some harm to Francisco in order to prevent him from being with her. Therefore, she asks Francisco "do you long to he hang'd?". But Francisco returns her questions with a delightful wit.

This means that wit allows the speaker to slide over the norms of a particular semiosphere by its ambiguous nature as the recipient of the message and the reader may interpret the utterance in various ways: as a bold statement or light raillery. The language etiquette of the seventeenth century can be perceived as a code of accepted linguistic behaviour within British culture which is reflected in the present play and perceived by the readers as an actual semiotic practice during the epoch when the play was written. Literary wit is applied here as a carefully codified language of love which makes use of teasing in an attempt to charm the lady. It opens up the possibility to say things (i.e. *I'le kiss, and stop your mouth*.) that would not be considered proper in a conversation between people who have just met and especially when this conversation is between a man and a woman. Hence, wit used in a teasing manner becomes a tool for testing the addressee's reactions without being caught on it.

3.1.4. Answers to rhetorical questions and clever replies to serious questions

A mode of wit that involves **answers to rhetorical questions** was not so common in the analysed selected plays. One example could be taken from Webster's play *The Duchess of Malfi*. In this episode Bosola comes to take the

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[65] FLETCHER, J. *Wit Without Money*. Available at Project Gutenberg:
https://www.gutenberg.org/files/13425/13425-h/13425-h.htm

Duchess's life but gets into an argument. During it Bosola calls her body "a little cruded milk", "a puff paste" and "a paper prison"[66] for earthworms. The Duchess takes it as an insult and rhetorically asks "am not I thy Duchess?"[67], thus claiming her superiority and maintaining her pride. By this question she is also reminding Bosola of her title which requires adequate respect from someone lower than her in status. However, he does not take this as a warning and answers her rhetorical question as follows:

BOSOLA: *Thou art some great woman, sure, for riot begins to sit on thy forehead (clad in gray hairs) twenty years sooner than on a merry milkmaid's. Thou sleepest worse than if a mouse should be forced to take up her lodging in a cat's ear: a little infant that breeds its teeth, should it lie with thee, would cry out, as if thou wert the more unquiet bedfellow.*[68]

<div align="right">(Act IV, Scene II, lines 94-99)</div>

The Duchess clearly asks the rhetorical question to make a point rather than to get an answer. In fact, the questions like that are meant to make the speaker answer for himself in his mind but not deliver the reply aloud. The answer is not needed since rhetorical questions allude to the information which is shared by the characters, the readers or the audience and the speaker. Therefore, usually, the answer to the rhetorical question is mental and not verbal, but not in this case. The rhetorical organisation lies at the basis of a particular culture, therefore, it reflects the individual consciousness, in this case, of the characters in the play, as well as the collective consciousness, i.e. the culture of the seventeenth century. What is more, the playwright incorporates such rhetorical construction of the text segments with unusual features of orderliness. This means that the rhetorical structure does not emerge automatically from the language structure but is a deliberate reinterpretation of it. The answer to the rhetorical question becomes a sign which bears a meaning. The violation of the structural unity of communication signals a deviation from the fixed royal hierarchy in which the Duchess is ranked much higher in her status and authority than Bolsola, yet he answers her rhetorical question in a degrading manner.

The Duchess makes a logical argument accentuating her royal status, yet it seems to be not persuasive enough for Bosola who aims to outmanoeuvre her

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[66] WEBSTER, J. *The Duchess of Malfi*. Available at Project Gutenberg: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2232/2232-h/2232-h.htm
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.

with his wit. He claims that the status does not provide the Duchess any relief since her life is worse than that of a person's with no status. Moreover, old age and eventual death do not spare anyone, regardless if they are in a high or low social position. Bosola caps his response with witty comparison when stating that "glories, like glow-worms afar off shine bright, / But look'd to near, have neither heat nor light"[69]. The pitch of intensity is produced by the comparison of glories to the glow-worms. Thus, like glow-worms, humans may sparkle and shine in outward glory and splendour at a distance but up-close they are just like ordinary worms radiating no light or warmth. In other words, using wit as an answers to rhetorical question, Webster allows Bosola to deliver a sententious moral statement that early glories are insignificant since after death they mean nothing and it is the depth of human spirit that counts.

To illustrate the mode of wit which involves **clever replies to serious questions** an example is taken from George Villiers's drama *The Rehearsal*. It is a satirical play that is aimed at mocking the heroic plays, their exaggerated characters, overly complex plots and sententious language. The main character in the play is Mr. Bayes who is a representation of John Dryden, the main target of Villiers's satire. This particular excerpt addresses the methods of composition that were applied during the Restoration, as well as public attitudes towards it.

JOHNSON: *But, Mr. Bayes, are you not sometimes in danger of their making you restore, by force, what you have gotten thus by Art?*

BAYES: *No, Sir; the world's unmindful: they never take notice of these things.*

SMITH: *But pray, Mr. Bayes, among all your other Rules, have you no one Rule for invention?*

BAYES: *Yes, Sir; that's my third Rule that I have here in my pocket.*

SMITH: *What Rule can that be I wonder?*

BAYES: *Why, Sir, when I have any thing to invent, I never trouble my head about it, as other men do; but presently turn over this Book, and there I have, at one view, all that Perseus, Montaigne, Seneca's Tragedies, Horace, Juvenal, Claudian, Pliny, Plutarch's fives, and the rest, have ever thought upon this subject: and so, in a trice, by leaving out a few words, or putting in others of my own, the business is done.[70]*

(Act V, Scene I)

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[69] Ibid.
[70] VILLIERS, G. *The Rehearsal*. Available at:
https://archive.org/stream/rehearsal00buckuoft/rehearsal00buckuoft_djvu.txt

The play centres on Mr. Bayes who attempts to stage a play. He wants to show off his supposed talent, therefore, he invites Johnson and Smith to come to his rehearsal. However, the guests quickly learn that, in fact, Bayes is stealing the ideas and literary wit from other authors and compiling all of them to compose his performance. He is not even ashamed to admit that he goes to the coffee-house or other places where witty men usually come in order to listen to them and secretly take notes of their witty expressions and then use them as his own. When Johnson and Smith ask him serious questions pertaining to the authenticity of his play and certain rules the playwright must consider, Bayes uses witty retorts to parry their questions. When Johnson enquires whether he is not afraid that someone might take notice of his doings and ask him to explain himself, Bayes answers that people do not pay attention to such things. The answer seems very simple and reveals his rather ignorant approach.

Villiers gives the reply to a serious question as an expression of satiric wit which targets not only the metatheatrical audience present in the play (since it is a play within a play) but also the actual readers and theatre audiences of his time. Thus, by decoding the literary wit of the presented excerpt the reader converses not only with the text and the author but also with the seventeenth-century English culture. Villiers uses witty answers to portray the Restoration audience who are fond of theatre as well as literature but not as much interested in the quality of the production, since only the readership or the public that is superciliously involved in a work of art would not be able to spot the copied witty expressions or longer excerpts from other dramas. Thus, through his character, the author criticises the playwrights who employ similar methods and at the same time blames the Restoration audience and readers, who evidence that, yet make no attempts to stop this practice.

Moreover, as Bayes has previously discussed his rules of composition, Smith, still trying to make him reconsider his use of the material created by others as his own, asks him whether he applies any rules for invention, to which Bayes retorts that he has one and it is in his pocket. It is obvious that the rules are not kept in the pocket but in one's head, therefore, Smith wonders what kind of rule that could be. However, by the rule Bayes means a book of his notes. Since instead of inventing his own witty expressions and picking his brain, he chooses to use his "rule of invention", i.e. a notebook which he can take out of his pocket anytime, open it, read and put in use. Bayes calls this "business" by which Villiers wittily alludes to the collaborative practices that were common during the time in order to produce more literary works and thus make more profit. Furthermore, it is no coincidence that Villiers places

the notebook into the pocket of his character since it points to the quality of wit – meaning that it is fast and ready but not necessarily used in an honest way and at the right time.

The conversation demonstrates a clash between Smith and Johnson who claim the true values of the literary community, and Bayes who is too ambitious to listen to their critique. Instead he calls them ignorant. Villiers applies satire and parody to expose his contemporaries' creative methods:

> Bayes's acts of plagiarism parody the contemporary practice of collaborative authorship that often took place in small-group settings. Collaborative methods of play production, where individuals might work together or actively "borrow" lines and phrases from one another, are recast as bald and thoughtless acts of plagiarism (Trolander, Tenger 2007, 108).

Hence, through the witty conversation between Bayes, Johnson and Smith, Villiers manages to reveal his attitude towards the heroic dramas of the period; while clever replies of Bayes might be taken as signs of a cultural appetite for a wealth of borrowed quotations. Though this satire was popular during Dryden's time, it did not stop him from the production of the heroic plays; nevertheless, witty accusations and remarks of Villiers certainly slowed down Dryden who was not willing to continue writing heroic dramas for some time.

Another instance of a clever reply to a serious question is taken from the play *The Duchess of Malfi*. It is found in the episode where the Duchess is confronted by her brother Ferdinand. She pleads for his understanding and asks if he would like to meet with her secret husband. Ferdinand agrees to see him, yet, not on amicable terms:

DUCHESS: *Happily, not to your liking, but for that,*
Alas, your shears do come untimely now
To clip the bird's wings, that's already flown.
Will you see my husband?
FERDINAND: *Yes, if I could change eyes with a basilisk.*

(Act III, Scene ii, lines 97-103)

The Duchess lyrically compares herself after marriage with the bird that is flying with the spread wings thus expressing her wit enriched with folk wisdom. She implies that it is too late to do anything about her marriage now as she has been married for some time already in hope that she will manage to appease her angry brother. Ferdinand replies in what would seem a fast consent. In this remark the author invokes the image of the mythical creature basilisk that is also called a king of snakes thus revealing the royal similarity to Ferdinand. Yet most of all he admires his exceptional powers to kill human with his eyesight:

The basilisk is usually described as a crested snake, and sometimes as a cock with a snake's tail. It is called the king *(regulus)* of the serpents because its Greek name *basiliscus* means "little king"; its odor is said to kill snakes. Fire coming from the basilisk's mouth kills birds, and its glance will kill a man[71].

Hence, Ferdinand would agree to see, in other words, to meet Antonio only if he were able to switch eyes with a basilisk in order to kill Antonio by casting a glance at him. The degree of hatred that Ferdinand feels for Antonio is evident in his intention of a sharp attack. At the same time, it could be seen that Ferdinand also showcases the sharpness of his mind by coming up with such a witty and fast repartee which involves a pun on a verb "to see" (meaning "to be conscious of what is around you by using your eyes" and "to meet or visit someone"[72]). It is clear from the analysed excerpt above that literary wit is inextricably linked with the context of the situation, the reader needs to be familiar with the participants in a witty exchange, their relationship as well as apply his mythological knowledge in decoding the intended message. The playwright carries his own sense and savour, and though his wit may seem a little distressing to the modern taste it still demonstrates the habit of the Jacobean reasoning and expression.

3.1.5. Double entendre

Double entendres, as words or phrases which contain a double meaning, are a frequent mode of wit in the English seventeenth-century drama. Actually, they have been discovered in all the analysed plays. This fact confirms that it was not affected by changing literary attitudes and continued to be applied throughout the entire century. However, this is one of the most difficult modes to decipher due to several reasons. The authors use double entendres to communicate their readers through the discourse of wit which involves a double meaning. In order for the readers to decipher it, they need to converse not only with the author and his/her text but also with the cultural traditions of the period since this mode of witty expression "sprang up whenever its speaker could rely upon the special knowledge of a homogeneous group" (Styan 1998, 201). It means that a producer of such witty lines was dependent on the contextual knowledge of his audience; otherwise the essence of the double entendres would be missed. In theatre, the spectators receive some hints from an actor who, while uttering a line with double entendre, applies a distinct facial expression or a specific manner of speech "inviting the members of the audience to join in a conspiracy with him" (ibid.). Naturally, the readers are not given such encouragement. For

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[71] The Medieval Bestiary: http://www.bestiary.ca/beasts/beast265.htm
[72] Cambridge Dictionary Online (hereafter CDO). Available at: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/see

them, staging directions might work as indicators of double entendre, if there are any. Thus, the theatrical audience and the readers are involved in a different type of artistic communication and text-processing.

Goth, explains that double entendre in theatre involves "a speaker-hearer interaction as speaker-induced and hearer-induced wordplay" which takes place "at the intersection of the internal communication between the characters on stage, and the external communication between the playwrights and their audiences" (2015, 71). From the internal point of view, "wordplay serves to characterise the dramatis personae and their relations, and allows for value judgements about the characters' verbal and intellectual abilities"; whereas, on the external level, "the playwright uses double entendre deliberately as an ambiguous phrase that has to be recognised and solved by the playgoers or readers in the process of interpretation" (ibid., 80). Thus, in fact, double entendres are created during a complex process of communication where the reader or interpreter relies on his external interaction with the playwright and the text of a particular drama. As a result, the decoding of this mode of wit involves socio-communicative functions when the reader has to interact with the cultural context and the collective memory that are imbedded in witty expressions.

The first example of a double entendre involves two different lexical meanings of the same word. It is taken from Wycherley's comedy *The Country Wife*. In the play, Mr. Pinchwife (note the intended wit in the name) marries a young country girl Margery as he believes that only an innocent wife from a village can be faithful to him: being far away from town she is safe from any bad influence and, therefore, will never make him a cuckold. On Mr. Pinchwife's visit to town he meets with his fellow friends Mr. Harcourt, Mr. Dorilant and Mr. Horner. Mr. Pinchwife wants to avoid their meeting with Margery for they are notorious rakes. Hence, he creates a lie that he did not bring her with him to town as she is too timid and uneducated, but Mr. Harcourt, suspicious of Mr. Pinchwife's explanation, suggests he should do quite the opposite:

MR. PINCHWIFE: *She's too auker'd, ill favour'd, and silly to bring to Town.*

MR. HARCOURT: *Then methinks you shou'd bring her, to be taught breeding.* [73]

(Act I, Scene I, lines 351-352)

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[73] WYCHERLEY, W. *The Country Wife*. Available at: http://publish.uwo.ca/~shroyer/authors/Wycherley/texts/country_wife.html

In this case, the double entendre plays on two different lexical meanings of the word *breeding*. On the one hand, it pertains to "the good manners regarded as characteristic of the aristocracy and conferred by heredity"[74] and accordingly the polite behaviour or courtesy which, according to Mr. Pinchwife, Margery lacks. Therefore Mr. Harcourt suggests she could learn it when in town. On the other hand, *breeding* refers to sexual reproduction[75], thus this witty answer implies a strong sexual connotation through an innuendo that Margery could get engaged in intimate relations with other men. Thus, in this particular case, by taking advantage of the polysemic character of the theatrical sign the playwright invokes veiled eroticism into the dramatic exchange.

The following example presents literary wit in which a metaphorical meaning is added to a literal one. Beaumont's play *The Knight of a Burning Pestle* contains double entendre reflected in its very title. The play comprises a witty satire of the audience and a parody of chivalric romances. It begins at the theatre where a play is about to start when it is unexpectedly interrupted by the Citizen grocer and his Wife who demand the play to be changed in order to adhere more to the middle-class audience and even propose their apprentice Rafe to join the play. Beaumont satirises the taste of the middle-class by disclosing the ridiculous aspect in Citizen and his wife's demands for the extravagant and unrealistic plot twists they wish to evidence on stage. In the Induction of the play (lines 48-51) Wife pleads her husband to let Rafe perform a brave deed:

WIFE: *Let him kill a lion with a pestle,*
husband! let him kill a lion with a pestle!
CITIZEN: *So he shall. I'll have him kill a lion with a pestle.*[76]

Beaumont parodies knightly romances that reflect an exotic atmosphere by combining an exotic element and a kitchen utensil when the wife suggests that Rafe should kill an exotic fierce beast with a pestle. This seems natural to her since the pestle is a tool that grocers frequently used "to grind ingredients for medicines"; it is also worth mentioning that "pestles commonly figured on signs above shop doors" (Kemp 2010, 219). Later in the play, the Speaker of

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[74] Oxford Dictionary Online. Available at:
https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/breeding
[75] ibid.
[76] BEAUMONT, F. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. Available at Project Gutenberg: https://www.gutenberg.ca/ebooks/beaumontfletcher-knightpestle/beaumontfletcher-knightpestle-00-h-dir/beaumontfletcher-knightpestle-00-h.html

the Prologue who is anxious to start the performance enquires how Citizen and Wife wish their play to be entitled:

SPEAKER OF THE PROLOGUE: *But what will you have it called?*
CITIZEN: *"The Grocer's Honour."*
SPEAKER OF THE PROLOGUE: *Methinks "The Knight of the Burning*
Pestle" were better.
WIFE: *I'll be sworn, husband, that's as good a name as can be.*[77]

(Induction, lines 111-116)

Citizen decides that the play should be called *The Grocer's Honour* to highlight his own profession, but the Speaker of the Prologue, in his turn, offers a satiric title *Knight of the Burning Pestle*. The Citizen and his wife cannot understand the innuendo presented in the title. The woman even states that there cannot be a better title since the pestle represents their trade and burning indicates that a pestle is shining because it might be made of gold. They are not aware that a pestle can also be a phallic symbol while its burning implies that it is "a phallus afflicted with syphilis" (Kemp 2010, 219). Hence, the author intentionally invokes this double entendre in the lines of the Speaker of the Prologue to ridicule the intruders. Moreover, Rafe's herald is really not the symbol of the grocer's trade but more of a witless and tasteless middle-class public. Hence, a pestle is used here as a sign-vehicle which generates various meanings due to its connotative breadth.

Wycherley's play *The Country Wife* provides another example of a double entendre. It involves a scene with Mr. Horner, Lady Fidget and her husband Sir Jaspar Fidget. Lady Fidget is secretly having an adulterous relationship with Mr. Horner. During one of their meetings they are suddenly interrupted by Sir Jaspar Fidget who pays a visit to Mr. Horner without a warning. Sir Jasper Fidget is aware of the rumour about Mr. Horner's impotency, nonetheless, he is getting suspicious about his wife and Mr. Horner's relationship. His suspicion fuels even more after he accidentally witnesses his wife in Mr. Horner's embrace. Though Lady Fidget is quick to explain that she is tickling Mr. Horner and even suggests her husband to join her, he disregards her jokes and wants to uncover the truth. Thus, he asks her what she is doing at Mr. Horner's place since she told him that she was going to the shop for china. Lady Fidget wittily responds to her husband that she invited Mr. Horner to help her select china since he is an expert on it:

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[77] Ibid.

LADY FIDGET: <...> *I was fain to come up to fetch him, or go without him, which I was resolved not to do; for he knows China very well, and has himself very good, but will not let me see it, lest I should beg some; but I will find it out, and have what I came for yet.* [78]

<div align="right">(Act IV, Scene iii, lines 99-103)</div>

This response and Mr. Horner's complaints (*A Pox, can't you keep your impertinent Wives at home? / some men are troubled with the Husbands, but I with the Wives* (Act IV, Scene iii, lines 89-92) convince Mr. Fidget that he should not be worried. He even feels sorry for Mr. Horner who has to attend to such tedious matters with his wife:

SIR JASPAR FIDGET: *Hah, ha, he, at my first coming in, and finding her arms about him, tickling him it seems, I was half jealous, but now I see my folly. Heh, he, he, poor Horner.* [79]

<div align="right">(Act IV, Scene iii, lines 110-112)</div>

But this situation is far from being innocent. Lady Fidget invokes *china* as double entendre since she is a true seductress as she uses its metaphorical meaning pertaining to sexual nature and, perhaps, a male phallus. Thus, *china* serves as a secret code for Lady Fidget to let Mr. Horner know that she desires to get what she came there for wishing to lure him to the other room:

LADY FIDGET: <...> *and has himself very good [china], but will not let me see it, lest I should beg some; but I will find it out, and have what I came for yet.* [80]

<div align="right">(Act IV, Scene iii, lines 101-103)</div>

The true meaning of the double entendre is known only by Mr. Horner, Lady Fidget and the insightful reader who is invited to take part in their witty and flirtatious game with language. However, Sir Jasper Fidget perceives the word in its literal, or primary meaning. Therefore, he is excluded from the witty context and is clueless of what is truly happening. In his mind, china products represent high class and luxury; while Lady Fidget turns it, through

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[78] WYCHERLEY, W. *The Country Wife*. Available at: http://publish.uwo.ca/~shroyer/authors/Wycherley/texts/country_wife.html
[79] Ibid.
[80] WYCHERLEY, W. *The Country Wife*. Available at: http://publish.uwo.ca/~shroyer/authors/Wycherley/texts/country_wife.html

applying another meaning, into her clandestine invitation to engage in an act of sexual intercourse.

The socio-communicative functions of a witty text are also worth considering. The author is interacting with the readers of his drama by inviting them to decode the message of erotic wit depicted in the mode of double entendre. By deciphering it, the readers join with the other wits, i.e. the author, Lady Fidget and Mr. Horner, leaving Sir Jasper Fidget behind as a witless one. In a meantime, Mr. Horner continues to play within the secret witty language game by introducing another double entendre. When Lady Fidget goes to another room and locks the door, he frightens her:

MR. HORNER: <...> *now is she throwing my things about, and rifling all I have, but I'll get into her the back way, and so rifle her for it...[81]*

(Act IV, Scene iii, lines 115- 117)

In the literal sense of this phrase, Mr. Horner states that, since Lady Fidget locked herself in the room, he is going to use the backdoor. However, the acute reader is aware of the secret intentions that Mr. Horner and Lady Fidget have. Thus, the utterance is much more likely to be understood in a metaphorical way. Then, Mr. Horner's phrase "I'll get into her the back way" pertains to an anal sexual act. Yet, Sir Jasper Fidget is so gullible that it gets him to utter an unintentional double entendre (which was obviously planned here by the playwright). He wants to warn his wife that Mr. Horner is coming to the room the back way and joins the witty game without knowing it. However, Lady Fidget is well aware of what is going to happen when she provocatively answers to her husband's warning from her point of view, at the same time ridiculing and belittling him for not understanding the witty discourse.

SIR JASPAR FIDGET: *Wife, my Lady Fidget, Wife, he is coming into you the back way.*

LADY FIDGET: *Let him come, and welcome, which way he will.[82]*

(Act IV, Scene iii, lines 120-122)

Sir Jaspar Fidget makes another attempt to give his wife a notice that Mr. Horner is furious at her and, therefore, he might offend or hurt her which also

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[81] Ibid.
[82] WYCHERLEY, W. *The Country Wife*. Available at: http://publish.uwo.ca/~shroyer/authors/Wycherley/texts/country_wife.html

reads as an unintentional double entendre – a sincere warning. The metaphorical way of revealing the nature of the possible sexual intercourse:

SIR JASPAR FIDGET: *He'll catch you, and use you roughly, and be too strong for you.*
LADY FIDGET*: Don't you trouble your self, let him if he can. This indeed, I cou'd not have believ'd from him, nor any but my own eyes. [83]*

<div align="right">(Act IV, Scene iii, lines 123-126)</div>

The scene gets more intensive when another lover of Mr. Horner, i.e. Mrs. Squeamish pays him a visit. Seeing Mr. Horner with Lady Fidget coming out of the room she quickly comprehends the meaning of the double entendre and is demanding to get some "china" too:

MRS. SQUEAMISH: *O Lord I'le have some China too, good Mr. Horner, don't think to give other people China, and me none, some in with me too.*
MR. HORNER: *Upon my honour I have none left now.*
MRS. SQUEAMISH: *Nay, nay, I have known you deny your China before now, but you shan't put me off so, come...*
MR. HORNER: *This Lady had the last there.*[84]

<div align="right">(Act IV, Scene iii, lines 182-191)</div>

It could be noticed that this scene contains a whole sequence of the double entendres. Mr. Horner's explanation that he gave away all his china and none has been left could be also understood in two ways. On the one hand, the conversation evolves on the topic of Chinese porcelain as Mr. Jaspar Fidget understands it. On the other hand, it wittily shows Mr. Horner admitting his sexual potency being drained and him being not ready for another sexual act. Moreover, when he states that Lady Fidget was the one who got his last piece of china, he might be figuratively alluding not only to his sexual drive and energy but also semen.

The double entendres technique remains the same but now it involves more participants of the witty interaction. Mrs. Squeamish joins into the conversation as a full-fledged participant who feels that she has the upper hand since she knows Lady Fidget and Mr. Horner's dark secret. Lady Fidget takes Mr. Horner's side and attempts to tell her that Mr. Horner is not lying. In a way, it could be claimed that Mr. Horner's scheme to pretend that he is an

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[83]   Ibid.
[84]   Ibid.

<div align="center">114</div>

eunuch has caught up with him since he is now truly unable to perform sexually. However, Mrs. Squeamish, knowing that he lied not once in the past, remains persistent which even insults Lady Fidget:

LADY FIDGET: *Yes indeed Madam, to my certain knowledge he has no more left.*
MRS. SQUEAMISH: *O but it may be he may have some you could not find.*
LADY FIDGET: *What, d'ye think if he had had any left, I would not have had it too, for we women of quality never think we have China enough.* [85]

<div align="right">(Act IV, Scene iii, lines 192-197)</div>

The two mistresses get into an argument over Mr. Horner. When Mrs. Squeamish wittily comments that Lady Fidget might have left some undiscovered china because she could not find it, the latter makes a clever repartee returning to a double entendre of china. In her repartee, china can mean porcelain which was so popular during the seventeenth-century that it has become a commodity of every elite household. But at the same time it might sound as a figurative confession that those times ladies in general were passionate and adventurous. Thus, here china could be perceived as a theatrical sign which might acquire various shades of meaning depending on the context in which it appears.

All in all, it could be observed that the discussed cases of double entendres play on an additional meaning which is sexual in its nature. Though it would seem that such wit would be more prevalent in comedies, since it can amuse the audience, the authors of the tragedies and other dramatic genres enjoyed double entendres as well.

3.1.6. Transformations of frozen expressions

The last mode of wit to be discussed is **transformation of frozen expressions**. It was not that prevailing in the analysed plays. Fletcher invokes such a case of wit when he applies a well-known proverb *charity begins at home* in his play *Wit Without Money* and transforms it by giving the frozen expression a totally different meaning. The scene involves Valentine, his younger brother Francisco and Lance, who is a servant and the main tenant of the lands which Valentine has recently mortgaged, having a drink together. Lance is angry with Valentine for putting him and other tenants in danger, thus, as he gets more drunk, he becomes aggressive with his master:

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[85] WYCHERLEY, W. *The Country Wife*. Available at:
http://publish.uwo.ca/~shroyer/authors/Wycherley/texts/country_wife.html

LANCE: *I must beat some body, and why not my Master, before a stranger? Charity and beating begins at home.*[86]

<div align="right">(Act V, Scene ii)</div>

Traditionally, this proverb is used "as self-justification for looking after one's own and one's family's interests first, or for not donating money to charity" (Speake 2015, 49). Thus, home is seen as an idealised place, and the family members deserve to be the first to receive love and care. However, Fletcher reverses the meaning when Lance proclaims that he wants to beat Valentine and uses the transformed frozen expression as his excuse to start a fight with Valentine since he is his master and thus belongs to his household. It should be noted that transformability is one of the key characteristics of theatrical sign, yet in this case the whole proverb is transformed to construct literary wit by a shift in categories and socially-codified values. The addition of 'beating' distorts the primary meaning of the phrase and immediately attracts the reader's attention. The unexpected combination forces him to take notice of the utterance, rather than continue an automatic decoding of a well-known proverbial wisdom. This way a trite phrase is put into a position of an unexpected prominence and interpreted as witty.

The analysis of the selected plays provides evidence that repartees and quips are the leading modes of literary wit of the seventeenth-century English dramatic wit which tend to incorporate other modes of wit within them. Moreover, to all the modes which have been discussed above, the mode of **self-praise** could be added since the analysis includes several cases of literary wit being conveyed by this mode. For instance, in Beaumont's play *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* Rafe's monologue before his death where he brags about his achievements and describes how his life was taken by an allegorical Death. Or when Valentine in Fletcher's play *Wit Without Money* boasts: "my wit's my Plow, the Town's my stock, Tavern's my standing-house" and, therefore, claims that "all Purses that wit and pleasure opens, are my Tenants"[87].

Another additional mode of literary wit that was discovered in the analysis of the selected plays is **flirting**. This mode of wit is closely related with teasing as they sometimes overlap. The difference becomes clear while analysing the function of a particular instance of wit. When literary wit is used between the

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[86] FLETCHER, J. *Wit Without Money*. Available at Project Gutenberg: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/13425/13425-h/13425-h.htm

[87] Ibid.

characters of opposite sexes, it mostly refers to flirting; while teasing is observed more between the same sex characters usually friends or family members.

To sum up, the witty discourse of the selected plays and the readers are activating each other. The readership generates meaning of the witty utterances while interpreting them, but, at the same time, its mindset is also activated by the new knowledge which the decoded meanings impart on it. Thus, it could be said that the texts and the readers exchange their systems of codes and this way enrich each other. Moreover, the texts of the selected dramas contain an image of the ideal seventeenth-century English readership and, as they reflect, it must have been especially keen on literary wit which permeates through the plays in various modes. As the analysis has shown, all the plays involve the two main modes of literary wit, i.e. repartee and quip. In addition, all nine modes of literary wit listed by Manson, Long and Graesser have been observed in the selected dramas. Two more modes, namely self-praise and flirting could be added to the list of modes. This shows that the modes of literary wit in the seventeenth-century dramas are diverse and versatile. The culturally-signified dramatic discourse is constructed through witty exchanges which are based on the pressing issues of the time (e.g. social class, corruption etc.) and adheres to functions of attack, ridicule, defence, establishment of rapport and emphasis of a significant idea. This means that decoding of such literary wit depends not only on the playwright-text-reader communicative interaction, but also on the reader's apprehension of the code system of seventeenth-century English culture.

3.2. Devices of literary wit in the selected poetry

Since the previous subchapter concentrated on the expression of literary wit and its modes in the selected seventeenth-century plays, it now seems fitting to direct the attention to the devices of literary wit in the selected seventeenth-century English poetry best represented by John Donne, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Andrew Marvell, Henry Vaughan, Ben Jonson, Abraham Cowley, Richard Herrick, Earl of Rochester John Wilmont and John Dryden. It should be noted that within further sections of the thesis both the sacred and the secular poetry will be examined as this subchapter extends an attempt to discuss the devices through which literary wit operates in various genres of the selected English poetry. The analysis of the poetic devices of wit is based on the categorisation worked out by Manson (1966) and Long and Graesser's

taxonomy of wit (2009), which includes the following devices: metaphor, simile, hyperbole, pun, apostrophe, antithesis, irony, parody, allusion, satire, sarcasm and hostility, and other, i.e. unpredicted tropes used to express wit in poetry.

This subchapter is also devoted to the determination of what kind of communicative processes literary wit entails in the selected seventeenth-century poetic pieces. It presents the analysis of literary wit in the seventeenth-century poetry within the framework of the semiotics of culture developed by Yuri Lotman and focuses on the socio-communicative functions of a literary text. According to the given theoretical perspective, the seventeenth-century culture can be treated as a semiosphere of multifarious signs within which literary texts have been composed. Here, poems are regarded as double-coded artistic texts with a more complex texture than natural language, thus requiring a specific decoding in order to be qualitatively interpreted and understood. The subchapter seeks to disclose the poetic wit which is treated as a complex means of artistic communication that encompasses a close interaction between the reader with the author, the poetic text, its cultural tradition and context as well as provokes the reader's confrontation of with himself.

If the seventeenth-century literary heritage is approached with regard to the socio-communicative functions of the poetic texts, their authors might be regarded as addressers who communicate with the readers or addressees through their poetic texts which function as messages encoded in a witty language. The energy channelled by the reader who attempts to perceive wit awakens it, since it is the reader who, by applying his receptive codes, identifies literary wit as a meaningful element within the poem against a particular textual embodiment. While reading and deciphering the poetic messages the addressees also communicate with the cultural tradition of the century when a particular verse was composed, but they also infuse the poetic texture with their own contextual information; thus, as an artistic text, the poem becomes a source and, at the same time, a receiver of information. Lotman believes that all partners of the interaction are equally affected:

> Texts from chronologically earlier periods are brought into culture, and, interacting with contemporary mechanisms, generate an image of the historical past, which culture transfers into the past and which like an equal partner in a dialogue, affects the present. But as it transforms the present, the past too changes its shape (1990, 272).

Hence, surpassed with multiple meanings, literary texts serve as substitutes of the entire cultural context which can be decoded by the reader/interpreter

during his communication with the poetic texts that represent a collective cultural knowledge. This cultural knowledge comprises literary wit which "may be obvious or subtle, local or universal" (Summers, Pebworth 1995, 1). It can also be described as "a habit of thought, both a poetic technique and a means of comprehending the world" (ibid.). Indeed, the poetic texts suffused with literary wit function as interlocutors who play an active role in the dialogue with their readers by arousing, intensifying and provoking the creative potential in the perceivers. As the analysis of the selected poetic works shows, sometimes artistic communication turns to be rather complicated since it involves literary wit which resists simplistic interpretations and instead requires an intense intellectual probing. It is also worth remembering, that, according to Lotman, poetic texts serve as mediators through which the readers communicate with themselves, thus acquiring a new or extending their existing knowledge, and in this way dynamically transforming their actual self in the process of artistic communication which is going to be examined in the following sections divided for convenience according to particular devices of literary wit.

3.2.1. Metaphor and conceit

As a device used to construct literary wit, **metaphor** is found in the works of the Cavalier poets who maintained Royalist sentiments, explored romance, celebrated beauty, the pleasures of life and, accordingly, adopted the *carpe diem* attitude and the Metaphysical authors who combined emotion and intellectual complexity of argument and explored philosophical as well as spiritual motifs with exceptional originality and invention. Lotman, in his turn, regards metaphor as a trope which consists of "a pair of mutually non-juxtaposable signifying elements, between which, thanks to the semantic context they share, a relationship of adequacy is established" (1990, 37). He claims that tropes form "the essence of creative thinking" and should not be regarded as merely "external ornaments" or "something applied to a thought from the outside" (ibid.). The poems selected for the analysis contain metaphors which are based on comparison, hence in them literary wit is evoked from a likeness between the properties in distant spheres which reveals the poets' creativity and, at the same time, stimulates the readers to invoke their creative thinking while decoding the message of a poetic text. Consider the given extract (lines 5-8) from the poem *To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time* (1648) by a Cavalier poet Robert Herrick:

The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,
The higher he's a-getting,
The sooner will his race be run,
And near he's to setting.[88]

Here, the mechanism of wit is structured on the basis of metaphor. As a celestial body, the sun is compared with the lamp as the only source of light in the household. The poet probably refers here to the oil lamp which was a common alternative to the pricy beeswax candles in the seventeenth century before electricity was invented. The epithet "glorious" suggests that the poet makes a hint to the reader that the "lamp" is of an extraordinary quality. The same effect is achieved with the use of the noun "heaven", thus metaphorically transferring a regular object into a divine one. The comparison invoking two seemingly unrelated categories is witty and also humorous to the modern reader. In the following two lines (7-8) the poet accentuates how quickly time flies by portraying the Sun racing in his chariot across the sky, thus alluding to a Greek god Helios who "drives a blazing chariot across the sky from east to west bringing daylight hours" (Roman, Roman 2010, 200). Thus, Herrick combines in his wit mythical (i.e. a race of Time in the chariot) and traditional elements (i.e. a lamp). The archaic semiosphere is induced in the poet's wit which invokes the mythical consciousness with a periodic understanding of time. As noted by Lotman, any culture needs "a special space-time structure, for culture organizes itself in the form of a special space-time and cannot exist without it" (1990, 133).

In this case the Sun could be interpreted as space (top-bottom dichotomy) and time (the Sun's race in the sky) figure as well as a character. The race of the Sun is determined by the day and night cycle. Hence, human life is viewed as a day where sunrise equals birth and sunset death. The poem clearly attests the *carpe diem* motif highlighting the brevity of life and, therefore, living in the present moment and enjoying all its pleasures.

In this respect, its author refers to the Classical writers.

Like so many themes in British poetry, carpe diem came to the British poets from the classical writers of ancient Greece and Rome. The phrase comes from the first century B.C. Latin poet Horace, who in Ode, I. xi, tells his mistress that their future is in the hands of the gods. Life is short, so they must "enjoy the day," for they do not know if there will be tomorrow. The theme was particularly popular in seduction poems of the seventeenth century, whose

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[88] HERRICK, R. *To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature:
http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/herrick/tovirgins.htm

young male poets followed Horace in reminding a would-be mistress that time flies, and they should enjoy their love before they grow old (Glancy 2002, 43).

The poet uses literary wit to provide an argument that, since everything passes so fast, every moment should be enjoyed to the fullest. As the title of the poem suggests, the poet devotes his poem to the maidens urging them to take pleasure in love before they turn too old: the motto of the Cavalier seductive poems proclaims that love not used is love wasted (see Brackett 2008, 60).

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today
Tomorrow will be dying.[89]
        (lines 1-4)

The reader who takes upon the challenge to isolate the meaning from language and decode literary wit in the poetic text needs to unravel the message encoded in a witty expression. Lotman notes that "every innovatory work of art is *sui generis*[90] a work in a language that is unknown to the audience and which has to be reconstructed and mastered by its addressees" (1990, 16). Hence, the reader needs to follow attentively the witty arguments, interact with the cultural context of the Cavalier literary period in order to understand what kind of philosophy has driven this particular poetic expression.

The Cavalier poets, entitled as such because of their allegiance to the King, wrote during the reign of Charles I (1625-1649) (Brackett 2008, 60). "They all were courtiers whose poetry focused on romance and Royalist sentiments, most reflecting a humorous, plaintive, or cynical tone" and their poetry was known for "elegant, and often erotic, language and imagery" (ibid.). Moreover, this was one of the most turbulent times in the English history. Thomas Crofts claims that "despite the troubled times the Cavaliers were always supportive of Charles, but it is certain that the poets saw what was coming and in their writing one can find <…> an awareness of political doom and, however obliquely expressed, a feeling of dispossession. It was therefore a great era for *carpe diem* poetry" (1995, iv).

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[89] HERRICK, R. *To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature:
http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/herrick/tovirgins.htm
[90] Emphasis made by J. M. Lotman.

Hence, it is possible to see how wit in Herrick's poem not only, in Lotman's terms, transmits a "ready made" message but also "serves as a generator of new ones" (Lotman 1990, 13). The cultural context of the seventeenth century enfolds during the transmission and analysis of the poetic language. Moreover, "a text and its readership are in a relationship of mutual activation" where the former "strives to make its readers conform to itself" and the latter "respond in the same way" (Lotman 1990, 63). Therefore, the interpretation of literary wit also encourages the reader to carry out an introspective analysis through communication with himself by urging to revaluate his conception of time and life on the basis of the linguistic and cultural codes of the time when the poem was produced.

As a vehicle of literary wit, metaphor is frequently applied in the Metaphysical poetry. Contrary to the Cavalier authors, who employed the social mode of writing, the Metaphysical poets applied the private mode thus focusing on their individual experience mostly concerned with religious sensibility (Hager 2014, 272). Therefore, a completely different subject matter is covered by a Metaphysical poet Henry Vaughan in his poem *The Dwelling-Place* from the second part of *Silex Scintillans* (1655), a collection of devotional poems. Its deciphering calls for the reader's communication with the cultural context, as well as the author of the poem. It appears that *Silex Scintillans* was the defining moment for Vaughan both in his literary career and spiritual re-birth. The poet has suffered a lengthy and severe illness after which he felt spiritual and physical revival. In its preface Vaughan writes that the true remedy for gifted men is "a wise exchange of vain and vitious subjects for divine themes and Celestial praise" (2015, 36). Thus, he converts from the secular themes to devotional ones which brings him literary fame.

The spiritual starting point of *The Dwelling-Place* is a religious text, John's 1:38-39. It describes that, after hearing Jesus speak at Bethany, two disciples decide to follow him, seeing that, Jesus approaches them:

> Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, what seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day.[91]

In Vaughan's poem the speaker also inquires God where His dwelling-place is. He starts guessing whether it is located in some covert fountain, shade, mountain which give him a shelter (lines 1-10):

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[91] John 1:38-39. Available at BibleGateway:
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+1&version=KJV

What happy, secret fountain,
Fair shade, or mountain,
Whose undiscover'd virgin glory
Boasts it this day, though not in story,
Was then thy dwelling? did some cloud
Fix'd to a Tent, descend and shroud
My distrest Lord? or did a star,
Becken'd by thee, though high and far,
In sparkling smiles haste gladly down
To lodge light, and increase her own?[92]

The poet uses original emblematic images of religious significance to express his wit. For instance, he depicts the cloud that descends to shroud distressed Jesus (lines 5-7). Indeed, in Christian art the ascending Jesus is often portrayed as standing on the cloud. In Acts 1:9 His ascension is described in the following way: "Jesus was taken up while those who had gathered together were watching, and a cloud took him out of their sight"[93]. Moreover, an image of the star is invoked (lines 7-10). The star also descends to take in Jesus and thus increase its limited since Lord is "the light of the world"[94].

The speaker admits that he is not aware where God's place of residence might be, but he is confident that the Lord often visits a cosy room by which he means his own heart:

My dear, dear God! I do not know
What lodged thee then, nor where, nor how;
But I am sure, thou dost now come
Oft to a narrow, homely room,
Where thou too hast, but the least part,
My God, I mean my sinful heart.[95]
                    (lines 11-16)

The effect of literary wit which is represented through the metaphor of the heart which is viewed as a room. This way the heart becomes a semiotic element of the residential space. Moreover, the comparison is intensified by

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[92] VAUGHAN, H. *Dwelling-Place*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/vaughan/dwelling.htm

[93] Acts 1:9. Available at BibleGateway:
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+1%3A9&version=ISV

[94] John 8:12. Available at BibleGateway:
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+8:12&version=ISV

[95] VAUGHAN, H. *Dwelling-Place*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/vaughan/dwelling.htm

the poet's creative move from the macrocosm with its mountains, clouds and stars to the microcosm, i.e. a man and his small "sinful heart" where God often dwells. The grandeur evoked by the macrocosm stands in an obvious opposition to the narrow space of a heart as a "homely room" which is further divided since only the smallest part of it belongs to God. Literary wit involving the metaphor of the heart evokes pious repentance: the sinful speaker offers "the least part" of his room when God's house offers many rooms for His devotees. Consider the following excerpt from John 14:2:

> Jesus said to his disciples, "Don't be worried! Have faith in God and have faith in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house. I wouldn't tell you this, unless it was true. I am going there to prepare a place for each of you. After I have done this, I will come back and take you with me. Then we will be together.[96]

Thus, in this poem, wit highlights that the speaker is filled with deep shame and guilt admitting his sinful nature in an apologetic manner. The symbolism of the heart is also significant since "the heart is regarded as the center of the life force, and also the seat of conscience, the center of the self, the seat of the soul and the emotions" (Schroer, Staubli 2017, 76). Thus, the heart is purposefully selected as a chief organ of a human body which stands here as a metonymical representation of the whole sinful body. Nevertheless, the speaker "dismisses external nature as a means of access to the divine in favour of the individual's inner communion with God" (Seeling 2015, 71). Hence, the sense of God's presence within the speaker's heart attests his inner serenity and strife for spiritual balance.

It could be seen from the analysed extracts that both the Cavalier and the Metaphysical poets applied metaphors to express their wit, yet the difference lies in the content. The Cavalier wit usually discloses the external and physical experiences; whereas the Metaphysical wit more often explores deep, inner, spiritual tribulations. Though it should be noted that this could not be said about all Cavalier or Metaphysical poetry since there are obvious cases (some of them will be discussed further) when social and private modes of writing get fused.

Moreover, metaphors which are used to convey wit in the seventeenth-century poetry might be very diverse. The poets who relied on the recognisable similarities between things applied metaphors or similes. But, contrary to their predecessors, the Metaphysical poets, were apt to reject the imposed literary conventions and flout them purposefully. Therefore, their imagery is much less predictable and more keen-witted. They formulated and generated more complex structures and, as a result, literary wit in their poetry

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[96]   John 14:2. Available at BibleGateway: https://www.biblegateway.com

is manifested through elaborate conceits which extend far beyond traditional comparisons.

Conceit is "a striking parallel, usually ingeniously elaborate, between two very dissimilar things or situations" (Abrams, Harpham 2012, 58). Adopted from the Italian term "concetto" meaning a thought or an idea, conceit became a characteristic device in the works of the Metaphysical poets (ibid.). Though, neither Manson, nor Long and Graesser mention a conceit in their categorisation of wit, it should definitely be included and discussed since its relation to wit is undeniable. In fact, conceit was described by Johnson as "wit" itself or "a kind of *discordia concors*; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike" (1868, 52). Dryden also defined wit as a "sharpness of conceit" (1808, 304). Thus, it could be stated that conceit is applied "in the name of invention or virtuosity" when the seventeenth-century poets "attempt to refine or rejuvenate traditional conventions and forms, creating the ingenious images and turns of thought" (Altizer 2012, ix). Therefore, the conventional way of portraying eyes as gems (e.g. in Edmund Spenser's *Sonnet XV*, lines 5-7: "For lo, my love doth in her self contain/All this world's riches that may far be found: / If sapphires, lo, her eyes be sapphires plain"[97]) or stars (e.g. in Samuel Daniel's *Sonnet XXX*, lines 1-2: "Oft do I marvel, whether Delia's eyes / Are eyes, or else two radiant stars that shine?"[98]) is extended in Richard Crashaw's poem *The Weeper* (1646) (lines 113-114) into a highly elaborate conceit of the eyes which are "Two walking baths, two weeping motions / Portable and compendious oceans"[99].

According to Lotman, "the third function of language is the function of memory" (1990, 18). The scholar claims that "the text is not only the generator of new meanings, but also a condenser of cultural memory. A text has the capacity to preserve the memory of its previous contexts" (ibid.). Hence, Crashaw's poem *The Weeper* could be viewed, in Lotman's terms, as "a semiospheric condenser" which is able to disclose not only the semiospheric vision of the seventeenth-century writers but also uncover their model of thinking. The poem is a meditation on Luke's 1:37-38 in which Jesus is anointed by a sinful woman:

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[97] SPENSER, E. *Sonnet XV*. Available at the poetry foundation:
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50048/amoretti-xv-ye-tradefull-merchants-that-with-weary-toyle

[98] DANIEL, S. *Sonnet XXVIII*. Available at:
http://www.bartleby.com/358/614.html

[99] CRASHAW, R. *The Weeper*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/crashaw/weeper.htm

A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.[100]

The Weeper in Crashaw's poem is Saint Mary Magdalene, one of the first Christian female converts who is regarded "the exemplar of Christian penance" (Rambus 2013, 254). The poet's focus upon Magdalene's eyes and her tears is not accidental but rather conditioned by the prevailing themes of the period since the literature of remorse associated with the tears of Magdalene was a literary cult which "flooded Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" (Martz 1954, 199-203). Crashaw might have been infatuated by the figure of Magdalene due to personal motives as he was also a religious convert to the Roman Catholic Church (see Graham 1996, 110).

Thus, his poem is "as ecstatic and intellectual contemplation of Incarnational theology" in which "matters of the soul appear as spectacles of the body" (Rambus 2013, 262). The reason why the image of the weeping eyes received such a special consideration by the writers during this period may be its exclusivity. The eyes were regarded as "a window to the soul" (ibid., 259). Miller also points out that the eye is "the only orifice" which opens "not to muck and slime but instead to the spiritual inside", therefore, "it is a window, even a portal, to the soul" (1997, 90). Moreover, "the eyes are also the only orifice from which a non-disgusting secretion flows: tears, which awe their privileged position to their source, their clarity, their liquidity, their non-adhering nature, their lack of odour, and even their clean taste" (ibid.). Hence, eyes and tears are regarded as signs which are laden with spiritual meaning.

Crashaw devotes 31 stanzas to convey the intensity of Magdalene's religious feeling and each of them contains witty conceits depicting eyes and tears. The particular lines (from Stanza 19) that were quoted above are frequently considered the emotional centre of the poem (cf. Parrish 1990; Lange 1996; Rambus 2013). The poet uses complex wit to express the intense devotion of Magdalene. He asserts that Magdalene's weeping eyes will follow him wherever he goes: "among the Galilean mountains/Or more unwelcome ways"[101] (lines 110-111). Therefore, they are depicted as "two walking baths", "two weeping motions" and "portable oceans". Such highly hyperbolic

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[100] Luke 1:37-38. Available at BibleGateway: https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+7%3A+37-38&version=NIV

[101] CRASHAW, R. *The Weeper*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/crashaw/weeper.htm

conceits take the reader by surprise since the inner exaltation of the weeper is expressed through conceits which are based on the exterior world which might seem to have nothing in common with deep spiritual feelings. Nonetheless, the more dissimilar objects are juxtaposed the more wit their comparison generates since such seemingly illegitimate visual analogues give rise to new semantic relations and unlock their interpretational potentials. Though wit which is constructed on the pattern of such extravagant conceits sometimes calls for a quarrel, and then mutual cooperation between the poet and the reader. According to Lotman, when the distance between the substitutes and substituted is so vast "the task of establishing a correspondence between them verges on the irrational" (1990, 41). In this case, the poetic fusion of common (baths), cosmic (motions) and geographic (oceans) elements results in an intense dramatic wit. It relates not only to Magdalene's weeping but also to the act of washing of Jesus' feet. Consider Luke 7:37-38:

> A sinful woman in the town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house. So she brought an alabaster jar of perfume 38 and stood behind Jesus at his feet, crying. She began to wash his feet with her tears, and she dried them with her hair, kissing them many times and rubbing them with the perfume[102].

Magdalene's washing the feet of Jesus is an act of sincere repentance for grave sins which is extended here to bathing thus cleaning the body to make it pure and guiltless of sin. Moreover, its overall effect is achieved with the use of specific epithets (walking/weeping/portable) which turn weeping eyes into active agents. Consider how Gary Kuchar rationalises about it:

> The poem unfolds by deepening the animating force inherent in its opening trope, prosopopeia, or the giving of face or voice to a faceless or voiceless object. By trying to create the effect that the poem is bringing Magdalene's tears into being, "The Weeper" not only expresses but seeks to convey the Eucharistic mystery of Real Presence – a conjoining of sign and signed, of what is said and the position of enunciation from which it is said (2011, 78-79).

At first reading, the witty lines in the poem might seem too excessive, outrageous or even ridiculous to the reader; nevertheless, they embody the extent to which literary wit can go. Indeed, at this time literary wit was understood as ability to create "apt associations of thought and expression, calculated to surprise and delight by its unexpectedness"[103]. Hence, it could

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[102] Luke 7:37-38. Available at BibleGateway:
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+7%3A36-50&version=NCV

[103] This is the 8 sense of wit which is said to be prevailing in the 17th century according to the Oxford English Dictionary (hereafter OED). Aavailable at:
http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/229567?rskey=nLXR0N&result=1#eid

be said that Crashaw's poetry represents to the Continental Baroque tendencies of wit. Sanders believes that Crashaw is "most decoratively baroque of the English seventeenth-century poets, both in the extravagance of his subject-matter and his choice of metaphor" adding that the poet can extend "traditional Christian images until they soar and explode like sky-rockets or inflates them until they burst like plump confections" (1999, 206). On the other hand, T.S. Eliot alleges that Crashaw was "more baroque than the baroque" (1996, 178). Lotman highlights that metaphorism of the Age of the Baroque is founded on peculiar "ideological and cultural premises", therefore, the poetic devices during this period are not "an external substitution of some elements in the expression level by others, but a means of forming a special ordering of consciousness" (1990, 43). To construct such consciousness Crashaw purposefully uses far-fetched conceits. They excite the interest of the readers by a shocking surprise. The image of the eyes portrayed as baths brimming with tears in following Christ reveals the author's exuberant and even grotesque Metaphysical sensitivity which goes beyond simple amplification.

Moreover, the poet sets his projection in motion caused by a continuous shedding of tears this way showing an extreme emotional state of Mary Magdalene. Crashaw envisions her each eye as a condensed transportable ocean this way revealing an exceptional fullness of Magdalene's devotion to Christ. Moreover, as a sinful woman, Magdalene repents of her immoral actions. The speaker and the readers of the poem also have sins; therefore, her devotion is an example that is set by the poet to be followed. In the previously discussed poems the poets remained with a single parallel, while Crashaw, as a typical representative of Baroque, labyrinthically transfers from one parallel to another: eyes→baths→motions→oceans, within the same stanza augmenting his vision of a vast and genuine penitence.

The author challenges the reader's mind into a mental exercise which, if the decoding of the witty schemes is successful, heightens the emotional and intellectual effect of a complex poem, intensifies its poetic reality, activates wider vistas of the reader's imagination and provides the aesthetic pleasure of deciphering. In this case, the role of imagination is of key importance, just as knowledge on which imagination is based. The reader cannot simply rely only on the visual resemblance of the compared objects since "we are made to concede likeness while being strongly conscious of unlikeness" (Gardner 1967, xxiii). The Metaphysical conceits often contain ingenious and most unexpected images which may be compared only with the use of intellectual boldness. For instance, in his poem *On Our Crucified Lord, Naked and Bloody*

(1646) Crashaw focuses on the likeness between seemingly dissimilar things and exposes their properties in a completely new perspective:

> *Th' have left thee naked, Lord, O that they had!*
> *This garment too I would they had denied.*
> *Thee with thyself they have too richly clad,*
> *Opening the purple wardrobe of thy side.*
>
> *O never could be found garments too good*
> *For thee to wear, but these, of thine own blood.* [104]

The poem centres on one of the five piercing wounds which Jesus Christ suffered during the crucifixion. The four sacred wounds were inflicted when Jesus was nailed to the Cross; while the final one, according to the New Testament, was piercing of his side by lance to make sure that He was dead. The Gospel of John 19:34 states that "one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water"[105]. By disrobing Christ, the Roman soldiers exposed Him for shame and humiliation. It is worth stressing that clothing has been "intimately associated with national identity, with class structure, with professional qualifications, with conventions of a particular period, with stages of growth and aging, with artistic performances and celebrations" (Lé 2012, 79-80). The image of the body, whether dressed or naked, gives basis for literary wit because of its shared experiential codes between the poet and the readers which enable their artistic communication. When deciphering literary wit in this poem, the reader "gives shame, nakedness and clothing a relational aspect" (Lé 2012, 84). Based on this relationship "metaphors of nakedness and clothing are capable of constructing a compatible model for the theological discourse of sin" (ibid., 85). Moreover, such Metaphysical poetry "simultaneously calls for" and embodies "a particular way of reading the body of Christ, and subsequently our own bodies" (Ellis 1995, 62). Through the image of the naked body, the reader is reminded of redemption of humanity.

The poem draws from religious iconography which frequently portrays Christ's Crucifixion with intense and violent imagery also indicative of the Baroque tradition (Marshall 1995, 43). The poet applies the grotesque expression of wit to reveal his bloody vision claiming that the soldiers have

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[104] CRASHAW, R. *On Our Crucified Lord, Naked and Bloody* Available at EEBO: http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A34930.0001.001/1:10?rgn=div1;view=fulltext

[105] John 19:34. Available at BibleGateway: https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+19&version=NIV

dressed Christ in His own blood as a garment which they took from His wound as a closet. Hence, Christ's body can be read as a text where His wound and blood stand out as signifiers of salvation. The wit in this poem operates not only through conceit (blood = garment) but also through paradox: Christ on the cross is naked, yet His sacred body is covered with His own blood, running from the pierced side, as if it were a mantle. Thus, Christ is viewed as dressed in Himself and in this way represented by His holy redeeming blood which was shed for all humanity. Christ's blood congeals into another substance, i.e. a garment. Read notes that this transposition "shares in the moral ambiguity of an act simultaneously cause for lament and celebration, at once glory evidence of a shaming barbarity and an ennoblingly regal, or perhaps episcopal, rich purple raiment" (2013, 142). Hence, the red tunic is indicative of His royalty; whereas red blood accentuates the divine aspect of Christ's Passion reminding also how the soldiers mocked Christ before His crucifixion. Consider Matthew 27-31:

> Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. [106]

Redressing (red robe→Christ's own clothing→sacred blood) is portrayed in the poem as a meaningful act which reveals the inversion of values. The soldiers put the red robe and crown of thorns to humiliate Christ though scarlet colour and crowns are usually indicative of royalty. Moreover, Chirst's blood acquires a deep religious connotation since it is not perceived in medical terms but rather signifies sacredness and redemption. Blood also means dying but it has two meanings – one, that Christ is dying on the Cross for the sins of all humanity, and second, that blood is spreading a red dye, thus turning into a red garment (Marshall 1995, 43). The reader is invited to participate in the Crucifixion and have a religious vision in which Christ's wound gapes as a closet and becomes an entryway into Him. The wound was made by a spear thus it is a rather small but a deep wound and the aspect of deepness allows for the image of wardrobe.

In his book *The Language of Metaphysical Poets* (1992) Frances Austin claims that "the mixture of more basic and, at times, colloquial, native words

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[106] Matthew 27-31. Available at BibleGateway:
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+15&version=NIV

with those that are elevated or literary <…> is typical of the metaphysical poets: they sought unity in diversity, even in language itself" (1992, 83). Therefore, sometimes Crashaw "shifts to words solely of native stock", for instance, applying such homely objects as baths in the previously discussed poem *The Weeper* or wardrobe here, but this is also done purposefully in order to achieve "a sudden effect of simplicity" (ibid.). Thus, it should be noted that the ingenuity of literary wit in these particular cases lies not in the elaborate language but, on the contrary, in its simplicity. Lotman explains this in the following way: "at a time when verbal games intensified, when the metaphorism of the Baroque had become a tradition and a predictable norm not only of the literary language, but also of the affected speech of society salons and of the *précieux*, discourse that was purged of secondary meanings and reduced to direct and precise semantics, came to have literary significance" (1990, 46). Thus, wit invoking simple everyday objects for the basis of conceits pointing to divine aspects is unusual but at the same time very relatable for the readers since such objects as a bath or a closet are used by them every day, yet have never been conceived in such a mystical poetic manner.

Crashaw projects his literary wit on the Lord's words from the Bible: "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved."[107] Thus, Christ's wound or a purple wardrobe acts as "a channel" by which the reader can reflect on his/her own "spiritual deformities" (Covington 2009, 14). At the same time Christ's wound can also be perceived as a miraculous door to redemption. The poet contemplates on Christ's Passion with adoration of the triumphant power of the Lord. The instrumentality of literary wit makes use of paradox: wound, which is the sign of an injury, sickness or even death, here means promise and hope for salvation. Thus, the Baroque image of the wound is a sign that "death will be overcome" since "Christ's sacrifice represents a triumph over death, and, implicitly, over the body and its corruption" (Ellis 1995, 70).

The poetic expression in the analysed case of wit stimulates the reader intellectually and also provokes deep emotional reaction. The shocking unexpectedness of a witty discourse with its elaborate conceits and their unforgettable originality induce, in Lotman's terms, the reorganisation of the reader's personality since he develops new awareness while decoding what the poet tries to communicate (Lotman 1988, 55). By applying the shocking literary wit, Crashaw invites the readers to reflect on their own sins and acknowledge the enormous sacrifice of Christ for the sake of the salvation of

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[107] John 10:09. Available at:
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+10&version=NIV

humanity. Hence, it could be said that literary wit is created for humanity's edification.

What is more, the poet claims that the garments of blood with which the soldiers have "too richly clad" (line 3) the Lord are "too good" (line 5) for Christ which is yet another paradox since nakedness paradoxically turns into too rich clothing. The image of blood is denied its liquidity since with time blood gets thick and clings to the body as a garment. In her book *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination in Early Modern England* Sophie Read reasons that this meditative twist is created "to replicate rhetorically in its double-thinking structure the familiar but elusive paradoxes associated with the doctrine of transubstantiation, where wine and bread become, in substance, blood and body while remaining, in appearance, themselves" (2013, 142). The Baroque wit allows the poet to communicate his religious vision to the readers in which blood is indicative of both the Great Passion of Christ and glorious salvation of humankind. However, the decoding process of such conceited literary wit asks for a special effort from the reader since it is constructed by the poet who rarely stays within the bounds of the traditional poetic imagery, but rather takes any experience as his material to be used in challenging poetic invention. The witty eloquence can be created by using the images which cover a broad spectrum of subjects that the seventeenth-century writers dealt with. In other words, their creative endeavour is closely related not only with the semioshpere but also with the sociosphere. As has been already discussed, Crashaw tends to rely on everyday household objects as a source for his conceits. For instance, Donne in his poems *Love's Alchemy* (1633) and *A Nocturnal upon St. Lucy's Day* (1633) describes love in alchemic terms; whereas in his poems *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning* (1633) and *Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness* (1623) the poet draws on geographic and cartographic imagery. Another Metaphysical poet, Herbert, invokes the domain of physics in his poem *The Pulley* (1633) to portray man's relation with God; while his poem *The Easter* (1633) is based on the metaphorical and musical imagery.

Naturally, in order to decipher such diverse cases of wit, the reader needs to be engaged in a communicative act not only with the poetic text but also with its context. He has to gain understanding in the fields of music, geography, physics and many other which might serve as the basis for witty discourse. Thus, wit in the seventeenth-century English poetry reveals the complexity of thought that was not known in the earlier century. The specificity of Metaphysical conceits in particular is that they are not brief as in the Renaissance but lengthy, sometimes extending through several lines,

stanzas or even the entire poem. They are often developed as intellectual arguments or series of arguments which propel the poem. To reveal this effect Donne's *Holy Sonnet XVIII* (1620) will be explored. The choice of this particular poem was based on the richness and complexity of its literary wit which enables to carry out an exposition of all the discussed socio-communicative functions of the text.

The poem focuses on the allegorical figure of the bride of Christ as the true institutional Church. Consider the following excerpt from the poem:

> *Show me, dear Christ, Thy spouse so bright and clear.*
> *What! is it she which on the other shore*
> *Goes richly painted? or which, robbed and tore,*
> *Laments and mourns in Germany and here?* [108]
> <div align="right">(lines 1-4)</div>

Here Donne communicates with his readers through the sonnet exhibiting its message. The poet is seen as the addresser initiating the creative communication with the reader as the addressee receiving his message. The message is transferred by the poetic text which invokes the encoded literary wit yet to be decoded. It is worth remembering that the codes of the addresser and those of the addressee are never identical. As a result, the communicative situation involves the stages of incomprehension and challenging search for adequate codes which would help to reveal the content of the poetic meaning since, according to Lotman, "a text that is absolutely comprehensible is at the same time <...> absolutely useless" (Lotman 1990, 80). Hence, as the addresser, Donne manifests his message through the text which is saturated with Metaphysical wit. The poet introduces his individual modelling system of the world which is conveyed through Christian epithalamic tradition. The metaphor which he applies is based on the Bible which refers to the Church as the bride or the spouse of Christ. Consider an excerpt from the *Revelation XIX* (lines 6-9) where the Church is described as a beautifully dressed bride who is waiting for a wedding:

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[108] DONNE, J. *Sonnet XVIII*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/donne/holysonnet18.php

Let us rejoice and exult
and give him glory,
because the wedding celebration of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.
She was permitted to be dressed in bright, clean, fine line.[109]

Indeed, there are similarities in the depiction of the bride in the mentioned texts. St. John presents her as dressed in "bright, clean, fine line"; Donne describes her as "bright and clear" (line 1). However, the poet is uncertain who Christ's spouse really is. Therefore, he pleads Jesus to reveal her true identity. The talk with God seems to echo the pattern of *The Song of Songs* (1:7):

Tell me, you whom I love,
where you graze your flock
and where you rest your sheep at midday.[110]

Hence, from the very first lines of the sonnet the reader is drawn into a conversation with the author who expresses his spiritual concerns. At the same time, the reader is communicating with the cultural Christian tradition of Donne's time in order to decipher how the author treats the possible spouse of Christ, whether the one located "on the other shore" or dwelling in England and Germany. The former is "richly painted", the latter is in a poor condition. Hence, the reader communicates not only with the author, but also with the cultural tradition. To be more specific, the witty text serves as a representation of collective memory, which, according to Lotman, is the second socio-communicative function of the text. Here literary wit incorporates a religious context in which it becomes meaningful. On the allegorical basis, it is waiting for the reader's decoding. To do that, the reader needs to familiarise himself with the religious context of the time.

It is believed that Donne composed this sonnet in the 1620s, during the period of Counter-Reformation which is marked by the battle of White Mountain when the Catholic forces won over the Protestant legion which drastically altered the religious landscape in Europe (Curta, Holt 2016, 772). The poet expresses his consideration of the events by enquiring whether Christ's true community is found on the Continental Europe with its movement of Counter-Reformation. He compares the bride to a luminous and

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[109] *Revelation XIX, 6-9*. Available at BibleGateway:
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+19&version=NET
[110] *The Song of Songs.* Available at BibleGateway:
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Song%20of%20Songs%201.

translucent or lavishly decorated lady who applies a lot of cosmetics and wears fancy dresses, thus referring to the Catholic Church of Rome with its rich grandeur. The author also extends his sympathy and solidarity while talking of the spouse which, on the contrary, is ravaged and tortured like an underprivileged woman, thus referring to the Protestant Church of Germany and England.

The communicative process in the act when the reader attempts to decode the meaning of the literary wit is based on mutual activation since the text acts as an interlocutor which corresponds and which is the fourth function of the text described by Lotman. It projects on the reader its own system of codes, yet in order to be discovered as meaningful it also encourages the reader to communicate with it by close reading. Only under such condition intelligence will meet another intelligence "for intelligence to function there must be another intelligence" (Lotman 1990, 2). Taking this into account, it could be stated that the reader is not merely reading the text but is interacting with it. As noted by Frances Cruickshank, "verse is living and active. It thinks, speaks, eludes, intervenes, overwhelms and overtakes. In its articulate self-consciousness, it woos both writer and reader, staging reflective conversations and sacramental intimacies" (2016, 1).

Simultaneously, the text of the sonnet communicates with the particular cultural and historical context discussed above. It is the fifth function distinguished by Lotman since the text not only acts as a participant in the communicative situation but also as the receiver and the source of information for the reader. Donne applies literary wit as an informant which self-recodes in a new communicative situation of the present day by representing the cultural macrocosm of the seventeenth-century.

Through the mechanism of his literary wit, the poet also reveals the apostasy of the addresser. The author questions his own faith since by his upbringing he was a Roman Catholic, a descendent of St. Thomas More on his mother's side. His brother died for Catholic faith. However, Donne changed his religion and in 1621 he was appointed the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. Through the message of this sonnet Donne communicates his deep religious conflicts. He questions the identity of the true Church and asks how he might distinguish who Christ's true bride, or true Church is. Is it the one that existed a thousand years before the Protestant Church? Is it not a matter of fashion which appears suddenly and then fades away: "Sleeps she a thousand, then peeps up one year? / Is she self-truth, and errs? now new, now outwore?" (lines 5-6).

Moreover, the poet uses the geographic code intermixed with the Biblical code: "Doth she, and did she, and shall she evermore / On one, on seven, or on no hill appear?" (lines 7-8). Once again the cultural context is brought up when deciphering the meaning of "one hill", "seven hills" and "no hill". The first reference alludes to the Biblical Mount Moriah where the first Temple was built by Solomon (cf. Balfour 2015), the second one hints to the ancient city of Rome often called the city of seven hills (cf. Vout 2012), whereas the absence of hill might suggest Geneva as the centre of Calvinism. Hence, it seems that the author strives hard to identify the true Church out of the two conflicting Christian traditions.

While communicating with the author, the reader is also communicating with himself since the conversation with the other usually leads to the conversation with oneself. As a result, in the process of deciphering the sonnet's wit, the reader is actually invited to start a conversation with oneself and, together with the speaker of the poem, search for the answers to the posed questions. In this case, literary wit functions as a mediator opening a plane for the introspective scrutiny of the reader's religious beliefs (which is the third function according to Lotman). The semiotic interaction between the reader and the text is also worth mentioning here since both agents of the communicative act affect each other. This means that particular textual structures stimulate self-reflection in the reader but, at the same time, such introspection also promotes structural density and complexity of the text since the reader also complements the poetic text with his individual insights.

In the following lines, Donne extends the marriage trope by suggesting that the search of the true bride is a chivalric quest. He envisions the potential believers as knights who seek to find a true religious community perceived allegorically as a bride who could be the subject of a pious devotion as well as romantic chivalric love. Thus, the Biblical allegory is reworked by applying its original underlying logic: if the Church can be perceived as a spouse when it should acquire all the features which a spouse might possess. Hence, just like any spouse, the Church can be open to an amorous desire which might be felt by the bride or she might be the object of the knights' adventure: "Dwells she with us, or like adventuring knights/First travel we to seek, and then make love?" (lines 9-10). By means of his wit Donne reveals the implications invoked by the traditional allegory and juxtaposes the sacred with the profane. Due to the epithalamic tradition, he eroticises the portrayal of the Church. In this sonnet, the poet recalls the erotic depiction of the female body of *The Song of Songs*. However, contrary to *The Song of Songs*, Donne does not stay within the romantic frame; he rather turns to the display of the radical physicality of

the bride. Donne extends a Metaphysical conceit in depicting the Church as a promiscuous spouse who might be involved in the adulterous affairs which is not found in *The Song of Songs*:

> *Betray, kind husband, Thy spouse to our sights,*
> *And let mine amorous soul court Thy mild dove,*
> *Who is most true and pleasing to Thee then*
> *When she is embraced and open to most men.*[111]
>
> (lines 11-14)

The inversion of meaning is grounded on Luke, Chapter 11 where Jesus teaches His disciples as follows:

> So I tell you: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.[112]

Here the door might stand for Jesus Christ who has referred to Himself in this way: "I tell you the solemn truth, I am the door for the sheep"[113] (John 10:7); or it might imply the Church which is regarded as the Lord's Temple and as such is always open to every believer. The poet reworks this idea wittily, yet in a shocking manner exposing the accessibility and welcoming of the Church both in spiritual and erotic way. Hence, the true Church depicted by Donne rather seems to resemble the whore of Babylon in the *Book of Revelation*.

The author presents a witty paradox based on the logical deduction of the notion that the true Church viewed as a bride of Christ who is her husband should remain faithful to him. Here the bride as Church acts similarly to Christ: she is "open to most men" (line 14) which has an erotic implication of intimacy. The Christian community is open to all mankind. The more believers enter the Church the better. Moreover, it can only be perceived as true "bright and clear" Church by those to whom Christ bestows a right to court, i.e. to woo and have a love affair with her. The yoking of the sacred and the profane planes results in the unpredictability and expansion of the paradox. It fosters the progressive image of the Church as a spouse.

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[111] DONNE, J. *Sonnet XVIII*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/donne/holysonnet18.php

[112] Luke 11: 9–10. Available at Biblegateway: https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Lk+11%2C+9–10++&version=NET.

[113] John 10, 7-8. Available at Biblegateway: https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jn+10%2C+1-10++&version=NET;NIV

The concluding lines are surprising or even shocking to the reader but this is done purposefully to strengthen the intended effect. The Metaphysical transformation of the Biblical image of the Church as a bride forces the reader to consider his own moral values and beliefs and reorganise the mindset through the introspective communication with himself. This means that the reader approaches the text from his previous individual experience but, through the contact with the text, this experience gets broadened as the reader acquires new information. Such an artistic communication works in two ways – it enables the reader to reconstruct his self-image but also reactivates literary wit in the poem and prompts its further operation.

Literary wit is a means for exploring the experience it conveys. It is not an embellishment to the poem but its centre and impetus. Therefore, it could be described as a thought-provoking construct. Consequently, the development of artistic communication is also a process of thought development. The deciphering of the Metaphysical literary wit is not prone to passive perception but prefers an active dialogue or even polylogue if the author, cultural tradition and context are taken into account. The intensity of participation in this communicative act enables the transmission of the message and communicative transaction between the participants since the productive synergy of all the participants in a communicative act reorganizes the reader's perception by expanding the sites of interpretation.

3.2.2. Simile

The following device listed by Manson (1966), and Long and Graesser (2009) is **simile**. It is very similar to metaphor except that in this figure of speech "one thing is likened to another, in such a way as to clarify and enhance an image" explicitly (Cuddon 2013, 257). Therefore, literary wit expressed through simile is more apparent and recognisable though not necessarily requiring less effort it its deciphered. The seventeenth-century poets resort to the application of a figurative resource of simile as a suggestive and imaginative expression of wit which helps to the articulate author's intended message aesthetically. To say more, they rarely ground similes on obvious resemblances, therefore, similarly to metaphors, similes in the poetry of this period are based on a rich variety of divergent things, actions or feelings and many of them are surprisingly, or even shockingly original. For instance, consider Herrick's short poem *Her Legs* (1648):

I fain would kiss my Julia's dainty leg,
Which is as white and hairless as an egg.[114]

The mood of the poem reflects the Cavalier tradition embracing a lively celebration of female beauty through a witty rhyming comparison of Julia's leg to an egg. In the semiotic space which is beyond the limits of norm a wide range of meaning possibilities arise for the addressee of such poem. Though, at first reading, it seems like a discordant or even teasing comparison due to the image of an egg which is used in such an unexpected context, upon closer reading, it is possible to deduct the logical basis for such a comparison between distant semantic spheres, especially when having in mind what kind of the shared attributes both objects possess, i.e. the colour and sleekness. It could be stated that wit expressed through this simile attracts the reader's attention by initial surprise. He may be taken aback by such an unusual analogy encompassed by the simile, pause in order to find out the links which would confirm that literary wit expressed through simile does not represent "the most heterogeneous ideas" which were "yoked by violence together" (1868, 52) as it was proposed in Johnson but rather stands for the acuteness of artistic mind which is able to observe the poetic unity in the most dissimilar objects.

The sensual simile appeals to the semiotic functions of the reader's senses of sight and touch since Julia's leg, imagined by the speaker in his erotic vision, stands out by its white tone and smoothness of an egg shell. T. S. Eliot observes that "the poets of the seventeenth century <...> possessed a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience" (1999, 287). In this case a sensation acquires semiotic value and serves as a means of perception which also encourages the reader to expand his creative imagination in order to comprehend what is being communicated by the author. As a result, the simile operates very persuasively through a sudden, brief, yet powerful association encompassing both sensation and imagination. The reader is invited to reconsider the image of an egg. Recall that the surface of an egg is ideally smooth, remember egg's roundness and relate that to the leg of a woman. The white colour of the eggshell is also significant since it symbolises "purity and perfection" (Biedermann 1992, 112) which are attributed to Julia. A new-laid egg is warm, thus resembles the warmth of a human skin. Moreover, though an egg seems to be casual object, in Herricks

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[114] HERRICK, R. *Her Legs*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/herrick/herlegs.htm

poem, it has an erotic shade. An egg is a symbol of "the mother, the womb" (Olderr 2012, 78), thus fertility and creation in general.

In Lotman's terms, the poem could be regarded as personal discourse which encodes the shared author-reader memory systems; whereas successful decoding of its literary wit creates "author-reader transaction", allows the reader to relate his own feelings of those of the poet, and creates a feeling of intimacy between them (Lotman 1982, 85-86). While interpreting the poem, the reader develops and intimate friendship with the author since they both share their private memories (ibid.), in this case, of their beloved woman's body. Though in comparison to metaphor, simile might seem to be not as discrete due to the words which signal its existence in the poem; this allows simile to be extended, stretched through many lines or even the entire poem and not be overlooked by the reader. Hence, it can involve complex comparisons involving very different semantic spheres which are not as obvious and require significantly more mental efforts from the reader.

Similarly to metaphors, similes might reveal unexpected shifts of contexts. For instance, the seventeenth-century geographical discoveries and colonisation prompted new techniques of visualising the world and human being in relation to it. Lotman proposes that "geography came into being in particular historical circumstances and took on different forms according to the nature of the general models of the world, of which it was a part of" (1990, 171). Accordingly, it could be claimed that the historical conditions of the period under investigation affected and adjusted the geographical contours and the entire semiotic modelling of the world and man in relation to it. This model was projected onto the poetry of the time. Consider how Abraham Cowley allineates the cartographic iconography with female anatomy in his poem *Enjoyment* (1656):

> *Then like some wealthy island thou shalt lie,*
> *And like the sea about it, I;*
> *Thou, like fair Albion to the sailors' sight,*
> *Spreading her beauteous bosom all in white;*
> *Like the kind Ocean I will be,*
> *With loving arms for ever clasping thee.*[115]
>
> (lines 1-6)

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[115] Cowley, A. *The Enjoyment*. Available at EEBO: https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A34829.0001.001/1:7?rgn=div1;view=fulltext

The poet invokes a string of similes to depict the speaker's amorous feelings. The poet constructs his wit using a substitution of semantic units by others from seemingly incompatible domains. In terms of body, the bellowed woman is depicted as a thriving island which is surrounded by the sea, the latter referring to the speaker of the poem. Thus, the effect of the simile is achieved by an application of semes from disparate semantic spaces and particularly from "the degree of semantic distance between the substitute and substituted" (Lotman 1990, 41). Though it might seem like a novel comparison to the modern reader, in her paper *Visible Bodies: Cartography and Anatomy* (2001, 90) Caterina Albano points out that "the tendency of the early modern period to conceive of body and space in terms of an inherent correspondence manifests itself in the practice of representation". Hence, the similes in this poem could be regarded as cultural codifications and their decoding enables the readers to disclose the conceptual paradigms of the body and space within the seventeenth century tradition.

Body, just as unknown land, is regarded as semiotic space which can be found and taken over. At the beginning of the poem (lines 1-2) there is no indication to what wealthy island Cowley refers to in particular, thus a female body, just like a new terrain, could be discovered and investigated. Lotman observes that according to their social ideals countries in literature were viewed as "heretical, pagan or holy" (1990, 172). He maintains that there is "a close association between the degree of goodness and climate: paradise is especially fertile and its climate well-suited for mankind, while hell is the opposite" (ibid., 173). Taking this approach, it is possible to treat the "wealthy island" described by Cowley as a paradisiacal. The "wealthy island" could also be interpreted as the fertile physical condition of a female. In this respect, conquering and enculturation are linked to a sexual act: a body of an island stretches like a female body lying in bed on her back; while a sea surrounds the island washing all of its shores like a lover admiring the curves of his lady's body while pursuing her.

Other similes within the poem particularise the lovers through specific geographic references. Cowley depicts a woman as the island of Great Britain which is indicated by its oldest name, i.e. the Albion. This title originated from the Latin word *albus* which alludes to the white colour and was given due to the chalk white cliffs of the southern coast of Great Britain[116]. The cliffs of Great Britain known as the White Rocks were a longed sign for the sailors who would be coming back home from the sea. In the poem, the cliffs are

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[116] ED. Available at:
http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=albion

parallel with the breasts of the beloved Julia and their white colour conveys her skin tone. The observation could be made from the analysed poems that the white colour of the skin is frequently attested in the poem as it was one of the ideals of the beauty in the seventeenth-century (cf. Crawford, Gowing 2000, 37).

In this poem literary wit embraces anatomy and geography in order to depict the model of the poetic world which unravels in an erotic paradigm. "The eroticisation of land and the specialisation of the female body confirm how anatomy and geography function as reciprocal models for delineating the 'mental maps' through which both corporeality and space could be categorised and represented" (Albano 2001, 104). When the image of the cliff is introduced, the poet also invokes the image of the Atlantic Ocean to present the speaker as a lover. Hence, in order to decode the wit of this poem, the reader has to consider not only the island with its white cliffs but also the ocean surrounding the island as a man holding his beloved in an embrace.

It should be pointed out that similes can be used to specify positive as well as negative associations. This is how Andrew Marvell implements similes to describe tears in his poem *Eyes and Tears* (1681) (lines 49-52):

> *Now like two clouds dissolving, drop,*
> *And at each tear in distance stop:*
> *Now like two fountains trickle down:*
> *Now like two floods o'erturn and drown.* [117]

This is another example of the literature of tears which prevailed in the seventeenth-century literary scene. Nigel Smith claims that "'tear' poems were quite common in the Renaissance, and were prominent examples of the achievements of baroque poetry" (2007, 50). Marvell obviously drew his inspiration from the previously discussed Crashaw's poem *The Weeper*. Just like Crashaw, Marvell dwells upon weeping though, differently from his precursor, he does not focus entirely on the sorrow of St. Mary Magdalene (only mentioning her once in the eighth stanza) and delivers instead a poetic contemplation on the causes of crying, description of its process and depiction of various aspects of tears.

Eyes and Tears presents its main concern in the very first stanza where the speaker ponders upon the Nature's choice of making eyes the source for both vision and weeping: "How wisely Nature did decree, / With the same eyes to

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[117] MARVELL, A. *Eyes and Tears*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/marvell/eyesandtears.htm

weep and see"[118] (lines 1-2). The speaker claims that men scan everything that is in their range of vision not discerning whether it is an "object vain" (line 3), yet tears may provide "sight more true" (line 27) and clear the vision which is not physical but rather spiritual; however, only if they are genuine tears. Marvell's poem, "takes the reader to the liminal realm of eyes, tears, and mirrors" proposing the idea that "accurate physical vision can confuse spiritual insight; mirror-like tears are needed to blur what is material and focus what is spiritually true" (Faust 2012, 133). The tears are seen as liminal fluids which come from the inside but pour to the outside. In this respect, eyes are regarded as thresholds where tears gather and as transition from the inward to the outward body. Moreover, as noted by Mary Douglas in her book *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo*, "clear, fast-running tears are the stuff of romantic poetry: they do not defile" (2003, 126). The author claims that tears suggest washing since they are moving fluids which "purify, cleanse, bathe the eyes" (ibid.). The speaker in the poem urges his eyes to weep since tears can improve the sight, besides, the speaker maintains that weeping is the noblest use of eyes which separates humans from other species: "For others too can see, or sleep / But only human eyes can weep"[119] (lines 47-48). Hence, it could be said that weeping eyes acquire spiritual aspect of cleansing.

Smith states that *Eyes and Tears* is a poetic endeavour to describe human nature whose "complexities and self-frustrations Marvell dramatises with hypersubtle wit" (2006, 231). The poet presents the Baroque fast transformation of tears by invoking a succession of similes. Since weeping eyes are liminal they can acquire any form, thus, they can be compared to the source of rain, i.e. two dissolving clouds (line 49) or a mass of miniscule liquid particles ready to pour. They are also compared to "two fountains" (line 51) the constant streams of liquid which in the Bible are "associated symbolically with cleansing, blessing, and the water of life" (Becker 2000, 119). Weeping eyes can even denote "two floods" (line 52) a huge amount of water covering the land just like tears brim the eyes and pour down the cheeks. According to the poet, tears can take both – a vertical projection and pour downwards as rain; or shoot upwards and stream down as a fountain, but also spread horizontally since flood is an overflow of water which submerges the surrounding grounds.

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[118] MARVELL, A. *Eyes and Tears*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/marvell/eyesandtears.htm
[119] Ibid.

While decoding literary wit, the reader is invited to experience the sensation of crying together with the speaker. The poet applies a series of similes in order to explicate the different states of weeping and its dynamic motion. The repetition of the expression "now" is also meaningful here since it reveals a disjointed projection of time that the author has constructed. Gary Kuchar writes that ""Eyes and Tears" are "frozen" in the "now" of consecutive moments, rather than the eternal "now" of hypostasis" (2011, 117). This means that the poet does not aim to disclose weeping as a continuous and integral process with its poetic wit but, rather, seeks to disclose the different states of weeping at separate time intervals. The reader's role is significant here as well since Marvell is the originator of his lachrymal vision overlaid on the axis of time but it is the reader who actualises the moment of "now" in the process of artistic communication. Hence, it depends on the reader's perspective when and how "now" is going to be activated (ibid.).

The poet uses his wit to lead the reader so that they both could experience the fragmentary configuration of time. "Now" in the poem is the present between the non-existence and after-existence. The directives of several "now" divert the reader's attention from one fraction of time to another by marking the boundaries when one episode starts and ends. The beginning of Stanza 13 is slow, the clouds dissolve and turn into rain which just like tears starts to drip. Then they pause: "And at each Tear in distance stop" (line 50). The action within the poem is just as meaningful as the stasis. It represents a prayerful meditation which corresponds to Crashaw's Stanza eighteen in *The Weeper* where St. Mary Magdalene is portrayed as praying while her tears metaphorically depict the Holy Rosary (lines 107-108): "Still at each sight, that is, each stop, / A bead, that is, a teare doth drop"[120]. Thus, tears are presented by Crashaw as beads which comprise the Rosary and serve as an aid to count the component prayers and recite them in the proper sequence. In their book *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination* Kimberly Patton and John Hawley comment that "weeping may act as a conduit between realms, literally "carrying" prayers to the remote reaches of the other world, whether conceived as chthonic or celestial" (2005, 2-3). Hence, the pause within Marvell's poem (line 50) reveals a spiritual concentration and devout contemplation.

The intensity of crying grows when weeping eyes are portrayed as streaming fountains (line 51), characteristic of the Baroque architecture, which indicate here of a person bursting into tears. The fountain-weeping eyes

[120] CRASHAW, R. *The Weeper*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/crashaw/weeper.htm

parallel brings forward the idea of tears which are projected upwards and only then streaming down. The upward movement of Saint Mary Magdalene's tears ascending to heaven was elaborated by Crashaw in *The Weeper* (lines 19-20): "Upwards thou dost weep; / Heaven's bosom drinks the gentle stream"[121]. Similarly, Marvell's poetic wit reveals the structuring of the spatial model of the world in the seventeenth century with its oppositions of top/bottom or earth/heaven. Lotman observes that "any movement in geographical space is significant in the religious and moral sense" (1990, 172). Hence, upward tears or water stream jetting up into the air from the base of the fountain before it drops back down imply devout repentance and a humble appeal to heaven.

Literary wit conveyed by similes adds vividness to the poem and stimulates the intensity of its emotion. This is especially evident when weeping eyes are compared to two floods (line 52). The eyes are viewed as completely filled with tears which flood them. Marvell artistically conveys it with the image of drowning. His poetic wit suggests that while drowning eyes and tears merge into one which means that eyes gain the attributes of tears and tears of eyes:

Thus let your Streams o'reflow your Springs,
Till Eyes and Tears be the same things:
And each the other's difference bears;
These weeping Eyes, those seeing Tears.

(lines 53-56)

The poet uses a strikingly witty paradox of weeping eyes and seeing tears to denote a discordant harmony of sight and insight. The eyes acquire from tears their characteristic aspect related to crying which would not be possible without tears; while tears obtain a distinctive ability to see which, logically, is nonsensical. This way two seemingly discordant entities are united and the devotee is able to see physically and possess spiritual insight since eyes may be fooled by the pleasant exteriors but tears, though blurring physical vision, provide spiritual insight or "sight more true" (line 27).

Deciphering the series of similes as artistic codes employed in this poem, the reader is able to come to a logical conclusion and appreciate the wit of the paradox in the final lines. Thus, similes make it easier for the reader to understand the message of the poet which may have been otherwise too demanding to be comprehended. It should be stressed that here literary wit is expressed through simile in combination with other devices (e.g. metaphor,

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[121] CRASHAW, R. *The Weeper*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/crashaw/weeper.htm

paradox); thus the overall effect of the poem is achieved by their interaction and cumulative interpretation.

3.2.3. Pun

Pun is a device through which literary wit is expressed by a play upon words. Puns are considered to be "the earliest types of wordplay" which originated "a fairly universal form of humour" (Cuddon 2013, 572). For instance, in his poem *Long and Lazy* (1648) Herrick jokes: "That was the proverb. Let my mistress be / Lazy to others, but be long to me" (1989, 230). Here, literary wit is expressed through paronymic pun (*be long* and *belong*) representing two different ideas at the same time. Firstly, it relates to the mistress's height as *long* has "the old sense of "tall""[122], though, perhaps, in this context it more relates to *longing* as yearning for something, in this case, somebody. The speaker wants the mistress to be lazy thus not enthusiastic about other people, possibly her male suitors, yet yearn for the speaker. Secondly, it means that the speaker owns his mistress, that her heart belongs to him.

Pun could also serve as a witty sexual innuendo when a word which has two disparate meanings is applied in the context that makes both of the meanings equally relevant. In another poem *To a Maid* (1648) Herrick plays tricks with language in the following way: "You say, you love me; that I thus must prove; / If that you lie, then I will swear you love" (ibid., 383). Here the poet uses a homonymic pun which involves two different meanings of the verb *lie*: the first, which denotes false speaking; and the second which refers to being in a horizontal position[123], hence alluding to making love or being ready to do it. Thus the speaker wants to test the maid and see if she is sincere about her feelings towards him, however, at the same time, he urges her to be intimate with him and this way prove her trustworthiness. Such mischievous wit was especially popular in the Cavalier poetry. The poets aimed to showcase their intelligence by humorous means often focusing on the motif of love.

Examples of the Metaphysical wit can be observed in Donne's *Elegy XIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed* (1654). The poem was supposedly written in his early youth when he was not married. However, it was not published until later years due to of its erotic subject-matter: "Censoring authorities refused to let the publisher include this elegy in early collections of Donne's poems; it was first printed in an anthology, *The Harmony of the Muses* (1654), and did not appear in an edition of Donne's poems until 1669" (Black at al. 2018,

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[122] ED. Available at: https://www.etymonline.com/word/long#etymonline_v_12412
[123] CDO. Available at: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/lie

925). The elegy evolves around male speaker who, using his witty arguments, woos the mistress to undress and indulge in physical consummation with him. In the opening of the poem the speaker pleads: "Come, Madame, come, all rest my powers defy, / Until I labour, I in labour lie" (lines 1-2)[124]. In this line the pun is realised through two different meanings of the word "labour": the first one, i.e. "to copulate" and the second, i.e. "endure pain, suffer"[125]. As Murray observes, "Donne's speaker "labours" in his unfulfilled desire to "labour" in bed with his lady" (2009, 124). The erotic schema unfolds throughout the elegy.

The female body is compared to America, the undiscovered land ("O my America! my new-found-land" (line 27)) which the speaker seeks to possess: "To enter in these bonds is to be free; / Then where my hand is set, my seal shall be" (lines 31-32)[126]. Hence, the female body could be seen as *terra incognita*, an unconquered land luring the speaker as the colonists with its riches. Albano is of the opinion that "the link between body and space is intrinsic to the historical process of enculturation which in turn redefines both elements" (2001, 91). It can be observed that Donne inventively manipulates language from different fields. The conceit by which the speaker compares the mistress to America is based on Columbus's discovery in 1492. Hence, geographical space becomes a domain of semiotic modelling in which concepts are metaphorised and acquire different values to be decoded by the reader. The wordplay on "bonds" refers to legal context and the colonisation which ensued after the discovery of America, but also might implicitly hint at marriage bonds. Hebron believes that "the poet employs legal terminology in allusions to the bonds, rituals and seal of the contract of marriage" (2008, x). Hence, female body is experienced as geographical semiotic space which needs to be conquered by the man. In this respect, the seal is not only a symbol of legal possession of a new-found-land but of superior male power as well. It is also important to remember that in those days a stamp was made by the imprint of the ring on warm wax. Thus, the reader is invited to imagine the speaker caressing his mistress body "before, behind, between, above, below" (line 26) or discovering the uncharted land by uncovering female body; and feel his desire to put his personal mark, to seal it. Such cartographic references

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[124] DONNE, J. *Elegy XIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed*. Available at Poetry Foundation: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50340/to-his-mistress-going-to-bed

[125] ED. Available at: https://www.etymonline.com/word/labor

[126] DONNE, J. *Elegy XIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed*. Available at Poetry Foundation: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50340/to-his-mistress-going-to-bed

might also codify "colonisation as the ravishing of the feminised land" (Makuchowska 2014, 35). In Hebron's opinion, "the speaker's sexual triumph is mirrored in the poet's triumph over language" (2008, x).

It should be noted that puns were not always used to arouse a humorous reaction or express sexual innuendoes. They were also constructed to demonstrate the writers' diverse ways of rationalising and creatively expressing serious spiritual concerns. To illustrate how the mechanisms of wit work in such puns Donne's *A Hymn to God the Father* (1633) has been selected. Consider the first stanza of the poem:

> *Wilt Thou forgive that sin where I begun,*
> *Which was my sin, though it were done before?*
> *Wilt Thou forgive that sin, through which I run,*
> *And do run still, though still I do deplore?*
> *When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done,*
> *For I have more.[127]*
>   (lines 1-6)

Though, religious hymns were traditionally used to express praise to God, Bloom claims that Donne deviated from this genre in a way that his hymn's "main purpose was not to express approbation, but to engage God in a debate" (2009, 70). Here the speaker asks if he will be forgiven for the original sin made by Adam and Eve which was passed on to humanity as a collective sin which all men are born with. The original sin is erased by the baptism but the inclination to sin is not. Hence, the speaker repents for his former transgressions, nevertheless, he confesses that he still leading a sinful life. Virginia Brackett states that "Donne repeats the verb do to emphasize again the active nature of sin" (2008, 225). Though God forgives his sins, He is never actually performed full forgiving since the speaker keeps on sinning.

Moreover, as noted by Lotman, a text can determine the position of intimacy in readership since "for the period of the reading, an author can make a reader as close as he or she wants" (1990, 67). In such a case the poet might eliminate some information which could be deciphered by common readership on purpose and invite only the selected readers into "the game of hints and omissions" (ibid., 66). Puns can be used as subtle clues to the reader while their decoding projects a feeling of closeness with the author. Donne's *Hymn to God the Father* includes the possible indications to the poet's private life. He poses onto the reader a test of wit expressed by puns on his and his wife's

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[127] DONNE, J. *A Hymn to God the Father.* Available at Poetry Foundation: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/44115

last names (i.e. Donne and More). While communicating with the text and its author the reader becomes a player in a hide and seek game. He has to test his own intellectual abilities in order to find the homophonic and homonymic puns which reveal the poet's identity through a hidden message incorporated in the poetic text. But to do that the reader needs to understand the context which provides the basis for further interpretive presumptions.

The exact date of this hymn's composition is not clear, thus the poet might have written it while courting Ann More (1584–1617) or after their secret marriage which took plea in 1601 (Parfitt 1989, 40-41). Ann was only seventeen at the time and Donne was twenty-nine. This was an important factor since "marrying a minor without parental consent" was considered an "offence against the canon law" as well as "a serious breach of the social code" (ibid., 41). Ann's father, George More, accused Donne of seducing his daughter. As a consequence, Donne lost his job as a secretary at Sir Thomas Egerton's, who was Lord Keeper and Lord Chancellor, office and was even sent to prison. Parfitt writes that "Sir George More's reaction when he was told of the marriage, and Sir Thomas Egerton's reaction to More's complaints, destroyed Donne's carefully-built position quickly and, in a sense, permanently" (ibid., 41). Obviously, the clandestine marriage has not only affected his career but was also considered to be a sin which Donne, being a pious devotee, had to bear with. Therefore, *A Hymn to God the Father* could be viewed as the poet's intimate confession.

The first pun is made on the past participle form of the verb 'to do', i.e. 'done' which also sounds like the poet's last name 'Donne' (line 5). Thus, it is a homophonic pun since both words have the same sounding yet their spelling is different. This pun is repeated in the poem for several times reinstating the author's argument that God cannot pardon Donne since he is keeps on sinning. Another pun is on the adverb 'more' which also refers to the last maiden name of Donne's wife, Anne More. Here, the homonymic pun is applied since both words have identical pronunciation and spelling. The puns imply the idea that God cannot have finished His task of forgiving and have the poet (*When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done*) as long as he has additional (*For I have more*) sins and passion for Ann More. Thus, it could be observed that without puns the poem would seem to be a traditional confession of sinfulness and a plea for redemption; yet after unravelling the additional meanings enclosed within a wit utterance expressed through puns the reader is able to comprehend the author's personal intimate message.

Such witty discourse is rather complex as, firstly, the puns have to be recognised, then decoded and only after that the meaning of the whole poem

can be fully appreciated. The reader who is not familiar with Donne's biography and conventions of the seventeenth-century culture, its traditions, religious practices and social climate has to rely on the critical commentaries or look for the codes in the literary as well as cultural context of the poem. It is also important to distinguish whether the interpretation of puns adheres to the effect of the particular stanza, or not. For instance, in the last stanza of the given poem the adverb 'more' (line 18) is not employed as a pun:

> I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun
> My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
> But swear by thyself, that at my death thy Son
> Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore;
> And, having done that, thou hast done;
> I fear no more.[128]
>   (lines 13-18)

In this stanza, the speaker admits that he has fear of afterlife which is expressed in a metaphorical way. The metaphor of spinning the thread could be interpreted in several ways. It could stand for writing, since spinning the thread as a cyclic, circular movement signifies an expression of "creative powers" (Andrews 2000, 188). It might also allude to the mythical context, i.e. the Greek myth about the three goddesses of fate who are told to be sitting at their spinning wheels and controlling human destinies – one spinning the thread of life, another measuring it and thus determining a man's course of life, while the third deciding the timing of a man's death by cutting the thread (ibid.). However, in this case, personal pronouns should be given special attention since the speaker is spinning his thread himself, hence he seems to be in charge of his life and not the goddesses, though, Donne clearly grounds his wit on this myth with some alterations.

Lotman, in his turn, points out that "unburdening oneself of sin meant going away, a spatial shift" (1990, 173). Donne's poem could be looked into from this perspective. Here the speaker expresses his concerns regarding his sins; he confesses that he is afraid of afterlife and, therefore, of dying, but sees it as a necessary shift. In Lotman's terms, death, is also "a movement in space" (ibid.). Donne describes death as perishing on the shore. The shore might allude to the mythical river of Styx which serves as a boundary between the world of the living and the world of the dead. According to the myth, the ferryman Charon takes the souls of the deceased across it to the other shore

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[128] DONNE, J. *A Hymn to God the Father.* Available at Poetry Foundation: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/44115

(Roman, Roman 2010, 446). Thus, it could be observed that in this poem literary wit is expressed not only through puns but also through metaphors alluding to the Classical myths which are disintegrated just so that their fragments were put together again with some alterations which result in the augmentation of meaning.

The speaker pleads God to swear to him that he will be saved by the grace of His Son and, if He fulfils this promise, He can have him, i.e. Donne (*And, having done that, thou hast done*[129] (line 17)). Brackett accentuates that "in some older versions, the word *Sunne* is employed, allowing a double meaning": one, "of the sun shining; without the warmth of the sun, man would perish"; and the second, of "Christ as God's Son" (2008, 226). Even with the modernised spelling it could still be regarded as a homophonic pun 'Son' meaning God's Son Jesus Christ and at the same time sounding like the noun 'sun'. The pun is based on the comparison of Christ to the Sun which is supported by Matthew 17:2 where he says that Christ "was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light".[130] The pun is reinforced by the element of shining mentioned twice in line 16 which is the linking feature that fits to both the Son of God and the Sun. The speaker believes that if after death he is in Christ's presence, he will not be afraid to die, since Christ Himself has died and resurrected and this gives hope to him about his eternal state.

3.2.4. Hyperbole

This section of the dissertation examines another device through which literary wit may be conveyed, namely, **hyperbole**. It is "a bold overstatement, or the extravagant exaggeration of fact or of possibility" (Abrams, Harpham 2012, 166). Hyperbole functions as an intensifier which presents a poetic thought in an excessive manner thus creating stronger emphasis, arousing intense emotions in the reader and thus providing a long-lasting impression. The understanding of wit expressed by hyperbole is dependent on the knowledge which is shared by the author and the reader because such wit is closely linked to the cognitive structuring of experiences. Wit expressed by hyperboles enables the poet to restructure the reality in his own way by highlighting the aspects which are most important. In this way, wit presents a unique understanding of the author and at

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[129] DONNE, J. *A Hymn to God the Father.* Available at Poetry Foundation: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/44115

[130] Matthew. 17:2. Available at BibleGateway: https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+17%3A2&version=NET

the same time encourages the reader to see the reality through the writer's perspective. Moreover, it is applied as a tool of critical evaluation, showing the poet's attitude which might be positive or negative.

In her book *Hyperbole in English: A Corpus Based Study of Exaggeration* Claudia Claridge devotes a subchapter for hyperbole in literature where she writes that "hyperbolic forms are employed to praise a character or an (implied) addressee in order to make the target of the praise stand out as an extraordinary person" (2011, 247). Therefore, according to the scholar, one of the "classical (and truly) panegyric locus [of hyperbole] is found in love poetry" (ibid., 248). In the seventeenth-century poetry hyperbole is commonly invoked by the authors to showcase the admiration of female beauty. For instance, in Marvell's poem *The Gallery* (1650) the speaker invites his mistress, Chlora, to examine his soul which consists of multiple rooms comprising a gallery that stores numerous tapestries of his beloved:

> *Chlora, come view my soul, and tell*
> *Whether I have contrived it well:*
> *Now all its several lodgings lie,*
> *Composed into one gallery,*
> *And the great arras-hangings, made*
> *Of various facings, by are laid,*
> *That, for all furniture, you'll find*
> *Only your picture in my mind.*[131]
>   (lines 1-8)

The traditional poetic convention of keeping the image of the beloved in the lover's heart is transformed by Marvell in this poem in an excessive manner characteristic to hyperbole. According to Robert Wilcher, by applying wit, Marvell is able to take "the metaphorical to absurdity literal lengths: if the lover's heart can contain one likeness of his lady, why not a whole portrait-gallery?" (1985, 25). The poet does not focus on a single image of the lady instead providing to the reader a vast collection of works of art focussing on her. It should be also taken into account that this way the speaker's private collection featuring his mistress becomes public which the readers as spectators can admire.

The hyperbolic wit in this poem functions in two ways – first of all, it strikes the reader by exaggeration which reveals the speaker's intense fixation on the object of his desire. Secondly, the wit of the poem lies in the unique

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[131] MARVELL, A. *The Gallery*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/marvell/gallery.htm

way of representation involving a visual strategy. It could be said that this poem includes, in Lotman's terminology, "a contrapuntal collision of different semiotic languages within a single structure" (1990, 57). Not only is the gallery full of the lady's portraits but these pictures are also double-sided, reflecting Chlora's positive as well as negative traits which shall be further discussed in the analysis. The poet, however, does not seek to reveal the outward beauty of Chlora but rather aims to expose her inner nature. Thus, using wit conveyed through hyperbole Marvell constructs Chlora's characterisation. As stated by Claridge, characterisation is the second function of hyperbole which sometimes overlaps with the first one, i.e. praise (2011, 249). It should be stressed that in this particular poem characterisation and praise are also interrelated with criticism of the mistress. In fact, the poet applies a specific schematic arrangement of stanzas putting hyperboles used for praise and criticism in contraposition and this way revealing the complexity of a female nature. For instance, in Stanza Two the speaker portrays Chlora as a dangerous killer:

Here thou art painted in the dress
Of an inhuman murderess;
Examining upon our hearts,
(Thy fertile shop of cruel arts).[132]
                    (lines 9-12)

In this tapestry, Chlora as *femme fatale* uses her "cruel arts" of seduction to overtake the lover's heart by torturing him with "most tormenting" weapons of her exterior beauty, i.e. "Black eyes, red lips, and curled hair" (line 16). In his paper *Marvell's Gallery of Art* Charles H. Hinnant asserts that this Stanza resembles a Baroque emblem featuring the cruelty of love which is often expressed "in the image of the lady who tests her beauty by torturing her lover or Cupid" (1971, 30). Moreover, the lady's image is in the lover's heart; therefore, examining his heart, she is also examining herself since the heart in this case operates as a mirror. Lotman claims that "a face in the mirror does not share the natural associations of a real face – it cannot be touched or caressed, but it can easily be included in semiotic associations – it can be abused or used for magic manipulations" (1990, 94). Thus, Chora's mirror-image is constructed to depict not only her facade assets (*Black eyes, red lips, and curled hair* line 16) which can be turned into dangerous instruments of murder but also her

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[132] MARVELL, A. *The Gallery*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/marvell/gallery.htm

narcissistic vanity seen in the admiration of her own attributes (*Examining upon our hearts, / (Thy fertile shop of cruel arts)* lines 11-12).

In Stanza Three, Chrola is likened to a beautiful Aurora: "But, on the other side, thou'rt drawn, / Like to Aurora in the dawn"[133]. It could be observed that by such comparison the poet invokes the mythical context and accentuates Chlora's goddess-like beauty as well as her sexuality when she is portrayed dozing in the East by stretching out her "milky thighs" (lines 19-20). Yet the poet does not rely on the exact representation of the mythical goddess. Aurora is traditionally associated with the beginning of a new day as she informs the god of sun Helios about the breaking of the dawn (see Andrews 2000, 19). However, Marvell transforms this mythical model of dawn by depicting Aurora sleeping (*When in the East she slumbering* lies (line 19)) Such transformation adds some humour to the picture.

Faust, in his turn, asserts that the poet depicts not several images but "a catoptric anamorphic image, reflecting yet changing the original view from negative to positive" (2012, 137). Thus, in a way, the view point of the speaker in the poem as well as of its reader determine what kind of anamorphic image is seen. This trick might be attributed to the cultural practice of the so called mythical portraits that derived in Classical antiquity and were popular in the Renaissance as "a hybrid genre bridging the individual likeness and the work devoted to religious, mythological, or allegorical subjects" (Hinnant 1971, 28). This means that the portrait of a real person was attributed the features of some mythical god or goddess in order to enhance the person's external beauty or ascribe certain virtues that were associated with deities. Here, such hyperbolic representation induces not only the process of poetic idealisation but also criticism. In Stanza Four Aurora gets transformed into a cruel sorceress:

> *Like an enchantress here thou show'st,*
> *Vexing thy restless lover's ghost;*
> *And, by a light obscure, dost rave*
> *Over his entrails, in the cave,*
> *Divining thence, with horrid care,*
> *How long thou shalt continue fair;*
> *And (when informed) them throw'st away*
> *To be the greedy vulture's prey.*[134]
>
> (lines 25-32)

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133 Ibid.
134 MARVELL, A. *The Gallery*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/marvell/gallery.htm

If previously Chlora was depicted as the goddess of dawn Aurora, now she is portrayed quite the opposite as Hecate who is a Roman goddess of the moon (see Andrews 2000, 129). The speaker delivers a horrid depiction of the scene where Chlora as a secretive oracle is telling the fortune from her dead lover's intestines. On the one hand, it might seem that this projects the theme of the mistress who refuses to accept her lover's death and mourn over it, raging instead over him and thus causing the ghost's disquiet. On the other hand, the mistress is trying to see her own future from her dead lover's internal organs. She is reading them as a text or a sign to tell how long she will stay "fair" or beautiful. This way the poet once again highlights Chlora's vanity. She does not care about her lost love at all which can be seen from the act of disposing the guts to the vulture once she gets her answers. Insertion of a vulture is not accidental since these scavenger birds were used for sadistic purposes (e.g. to peck Prometheus's liver as a punishment of Zeus). Nonetheless, in Marvell's poem, the vulture does not get to devour his whole pray but has to do instead with disposed entrails.

In the Fifth Stanza the speaker describes his mistress as a Roman goddess Venus: "But, against that, thou sit'st afloat, / Like Venus in her pearly boat"[135]. Thus, the poet's primary encoding is realised by identifying Chlora with the mythical deity Venus representing her in accordance to the famous painting of Sandro Botticelli *The Birth of Venus* (c. 1484-1486). Similarly, to the Roman goddess of love Chlora is rising from the sea in the boat of a seashell. The grandeur of the scene is increased by invoking smell through "a Mass of Ambergris", a substance produced in the digestive system of whales, which has "a low-intensity odor, with the fixative quality of lifting or "exalting" other odorants" (Miller, Miller 1990, 38). Thus it uplifts Venus's smell which is described as perfume. Hence, the reader is encouraged not only to recall the famous painting but also attempt to use his sense of smell. By describing Chlora as a mythical deity the speaker elevates her and provides her the supernatural quality in a way diminishing himself as a mortal human being.

Moreover, the speaker enlightens that he has more tapestries of his mistress:

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[135] MARVELL, A. *The Gallery*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/marvell/gallery.htm

These pictures, and a thousand more,
Of thee, my gallery doth store,
In all the forms thou canst invent,
Either to please me, or torment.[136]

              (lines 41-44)

This means that his picture gallery of the soul encompasses even more possible sides of Chlora which the speaker has discerned. The poet hyperbolises not only the volume of his gallery but also its contents by stating that his collection is more diverse than "Whitehall's, or Mantua's were" (line 48). To understand literary wit of this stanza the reader needs to rely on his historical and art knowledge so that he could decipher the cultural references that the poet refers to. Here, the speaker points to the Duke of Mantua's lavish collection of paintings which he had to sell because of his financial hardship. King Charles I purchased it in 1629 and thus increased the royal collection at Whitehall (see Gregg 1984, 166-169). Hence, Marvell hyperbolically claims that the collection of the speaker is far richer in number and variety than the royal one. This means that Chlora's dissociative identity has many more personality states which show her alternative behaviour patterns.

Moreover, the speaker suggests that the author of all these pictures is his mistress (line 43) which means that she is the representation of all these different characters combined within her. By means of wit, Marvell fuses love and artistic representation into one "poetic ekphrasis", i.e. "detailed description of an image, primary visual" (Greene, Crushman 2016, 86). The intention of the poet to apply hyperbole responds to the essential purpose of ekphrasis as it was originally used in rhetoric "to focus and amplify emotions, with the rhetor lingering over key aspects of an image in order to persuade his audience" (ibid.). In this poem, Marvell portrays various sides of the mistress to reveal the complexity of Chlora's individuality. The poem also presents "a transition in artistic taste from the pictorial narratives of arras-hangings popular in Tudor and Jacobean England to the cosmopolitan fashions of Mannerist painting embraced by the Caroline court, and in particular the genre of allegorical or mythical portrait" (Smith 2007, 92). This means that the poem stores information about the actual changes in the seventeenth-century art which the readers can recover.

The speaker ends his guided tour around the gallery with his favourite tapestry hanging at the entrance of the gallery which attests for it being the first image of Chlora that the speaker has seen, i.e. the picture of "a tender

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[136] Ibid.

shepherdess" (line 53). Smith states that such "pastoral subjects were a major topic in which the change from Mannerist to Baroque style was registered" (ibid.). Thus, the tour of the speaker's passion is also a tour of the changing taste in art. The speaker's return to the portrait of the tender shepherdess is meaningful, since through his selection, the reader is able to reconstruct a wider cultural view of what was considered to be popular in art but also of what was valued in human nature. Contrary to all the other depicted characters, the shepherdess denotes innocent love which is encoded in the very name of the mistress since Chlora in Greek means 'green' thus innocent and chaste (see Faust 2012, 134). What is more, a series of pictures make up not only the gallery of art but also the picture of the speaker's very soul. Faust claims that Chlora's rich portrayal in the collection also reflects the speaker's "power, taste, and privilege" (ibid., 135).

The poem offers communication which involves various semiotic languages within one complex structure of the poem. In this respect, hyperbolic wit allows the poet to merge the pictorial and poetic languages together. Marvell also applies myth which is a significant text-informing mechanism. Lotman asserts that the function of myth is "to create a picture of the world, to establish identity between distant spheres" (1990, 152). This is precisely what has been achieved through this poem. It reveals the artistic trends of the period as well as creates a vivid, dynamic and playful portrait of a complex female identity.

It should be noted that hyperbole is frequently invoked for ironic and parodic effects. Such cases of hyperbole will be analysed further in the analysis of other devices of wit which are linked together with hyperbole (see sections 3.2.7 and 3.2.8).

3.2.5. Apostrophe

This section will analyse literary wit expressed through **apostrophes**. In his book *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* Culler writes that an apostrophe is different from other tropes because "it makes its point by troping not on the meaning of a word but on the circuit or situation of communication itself" (2005, 149). This is because while using apostrophes the poet/addresser, as if turns away from his readers/addressees and converses with "a thing, a place, an abstract quality, an idea, a dead or absent person" (Cuddon 2013, 49). Though, the origins of this device date back to antiquity, its application in the seventeenth-century poetry could not be attributed on the Classical influence only. If, in Lotman's view, the socio-communicative functions of the text involve the interaction between the author as addresser

and the reader as addressee, the addressee with himself, the reader with the text, the audience and the cultural tradition, and the cultural context with the text (see Lotman 1988, 55), when, in this case, the author as addresser is engaged in a conversation with an imaginary entity and through it with the reader. This way, the conversation, while seemingly excluding the reader, becomes meaningful only if he joins in as a decoder of witty discourse which is evoked by the very exchange of conversation.

The reasons why poets chose to use apostrophes to express their wit depend on the poem's theme and mood. Culler points out that most often apostrophes "serve as intensifiers, as images of invested passion" (2005, 152). Thus they "indicate intense involvement in the situation described" (ibid.). For instance, this is how Crashaw addresses St. Mary Magdalene's crying eyes in his poem *The Weeper*:

> *Hail, sister springs,*
> *Parents of silver-footed rills!*
> *Ever bubbling things!*
> *Thawing crystal! Snowy hills!*
> *Still spending, never spent; I mean*
> *Thy fair eyes, sweet Magdalene.* [137]
>   (lines 1-6)

The poet lavishes his address with Baroque rhetoric to highlight his deeply felt admiration for St. Magdalene's sorrow which is evident from her weeping eyes. The speaker of the poem relives the Biblical scene where Magdalene sheds penitent tears when asking Christ to be forgiven for her sins. The speaker's active involvement is evident in the use of multiple, effective apostrophes which go in sequence at the very outset of the poem captivate the reader's attention by revealing the speaker's passionate wonder and produce intensity. Moreover, they show the speaker's emotional state which could be perceived from several exclamations. As noted by Culler, "apostrophe reinforces description, attaching intensified emotion to what is described" (2005, 153). Indeed, the poet enhances his apostrophes by specific figurative language metaphorically concealing his addressee until the last line of the stanza.

Crashaw portrays the eyes by using water imagery. They are addressed as "sister springs" to accentuate that they are two sources of tears or their "parents" (lines 1-2). Magdalene's eyes are lively, "ever bubbling" and

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[137] CRASHAW, R. *The Weeper*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/crashaw/weeper.htm

"thawing" (lines 3-4) thus the eyes are themselves active agents of the discourse. The quality of tears is stressed by their silver colour, transparency (crystal) and their dynamism, i.e. water turning into a frozen substance (snowy hills). The poet contemplates on the infinite nature of Magdalene's weeping by stating that her tears are "still spending, never spent" (line 5). Her tears serve as instruments to arouse the reader's sympathy and even identification with the Saint. While deciphering the poem the reader also converses the text, the speaker, the Saint and with himself. With the help of apostrophes, the author draws the reader into an active participation, rather than a passive interpretation. He urges him to see himself as a repentant sinner and, grieving over his sins, seek penance with St. Magdalene as a moral example. In his book *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow in Early Modern England* Kuchar claims the following:

> Crashaw thus uses the tendency within apostrophic modes of utterance to position readers within the circle of address as a way of communicating the sacramental or participatory dimension of Magdalene's tears: the poem's apostrophe creates a liturgical sense of active participation between speaker, saint, and reader, leading readers of "The Weeper" to share in the salvific power of Magdalene's tears rather than merely to interpret them as signs (2011, 82).

Hence, in this poem, apostrophes are used to intensify the pious emotion, signify the speaker's active involvement in the scene that is portrayed, recreate the effect of the real presence of conversation and engage the reader to participate in it.

As a vehicle to express literary wit, apostrophe is observed in Henry Vaughan's pattern poem *The Waterfall* (1655). The originality of the so called pattern or concrete poetry lies in its movement which "depends on the careful placement and programming of words or letters line by line or page by page in order to achieve a visual pattern" (Cuddon 2013, 385). This means that the verse is arranged to form a specific design and acquire a shape of the subject of the poem – in this case, the waterfall. In his book *Pattern Poetry– Guide to an Unknown Literature* Dick Higgins suggests that "British pattern poetry begins in the last quarter of the [sixteenth] century with eight Latin pieces – an altar, a sword, an egg, a pear, a syrinx, a set of wings, an inverted pyramid, and an axe" (1987, 95). The author also notes that English pattern poetry differs in its "formal conservatism" which means that most of the poems "imitate the shapes of the Hellenistic Greek models – axes, altars, eggs, wings, syrinxes" (ibid.). Hence, *The Waterfall* is a rare example of the pattern poem whose silhouette exhibits an unconventional shape. If the poem, in Lotman's view, is a semiotic structure or system of signs (see Lotman 1977, 12-25), when the shape of the pattern poem might be regarded as an additional sign

which bears its own informational load that is transmitted to the reader. The scholar explains that the shape of the poem can "disrupt the automatism of perception" and, by directing the reader's attention to the specific points, produce "a higher level of information flow" (1976, xxii). This is significant in poetry as the ability to generate more information is "one of the main characteristics of art" (ibid.), besides it could be a marker of the poetic text Lotman describes this in the following way:

> In earlier times graphic devices were often an integral part of poetry. Not only in the use of the poetic line but in the use of frames, vignettes, and so on. In extreme cases the very shape of the poem mimicked some aspect of content, e.g., a love poem printed in the shape of a heart. This is an extreme case of iconicity in which visual appearance carries aesthetic information. Such features in their less extravagant forms came to be viewed as markers of poetry as opposed to prose (ibid., xxi).

Hence, both the poetic text and its pictorial typography become significant and the meaning is generated through reading and viewing the poem. Now it is possible to proceed and disclose how it is implemented in *The Waterfall*.

At the beginning of the poem, the speaker is found sitting near the waterfall. It seems that the poet admires its cascading water but, in fact, through nature he contemplates the spiritual concerns. He ponders on a transience of time and mutability of human existence. The meaning of this poem is communicated not only through apostrophes and other stylistic devices but also through its graphic shape. The poet arranges the design of the shorter and longer lines so that they would resemble an actual waterfall:

> WITH what deep murmurs, through Time's silent stealth,
> Doth thy transparent, cool, and wat'ry wealth,
> Here flowing fall,
> And chide and call,
> As if his liquid, loose retinue stay'd
> Ling'ring, and were of this steep place afraid,
> The common pass,
> Where clear as glass,
> All must descend
> Not to an end,
> But quick'ned by this deep and rocky grave,
> Rise to a longer course more bright and brave.[138]
>
> (lines 1-12)

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[138] VAUGHAN, H. *The Waterfall*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/vaughan/waterfall.htm

As could be observed, lines 1-2 are the longest in the extract presented above since they stand for the ledge of the waterfall. The following lines 3-4 are much shorter as they are designed to resemble a sudden vertical drop of the water. Lines 5-6 might indicate the rocky steps of the water cascade, thus also resembling a pause or hesitation before falling down. Whereas lines 7-10 are similar in their length to lines 3-4 and, just like the former, resemble the water drop. The last two lines of the stanza suggest a plunge pool. Though this stanza does not give a clear indication that it alludes to anything other than a natural phenomenon, the whole poem is, in fact, a spiritual meditation on death and resurrection. *The Dictionary of Symbols* informs that water is "a mediator between life and death, with a two-way positive and negative flow of creation and destruction" (Cirlot 2013, 365). Therefore, it is no coincidence that the poet selected this particular shape representing irreversible flow of water and conjoining within the images of death and life.

The reader is invited to envision the waterfall and hear its sound. The speaker addresses the waterfall and contemplates on its flow and fall. To him, the sound of the flowing water approaching the waterfall signifies its hesitancy to fall through "the common pass" (line 7) into "deep rocky grave" (line 11). Death is portrayed as "the common pass" (line 7) since everyone has to endure it. The thought of inevitable death frightens the speaker as he does not want to die, or "descend" (line 9), as the poet conveys. Death is viewed as a vertical downward spatial shift, opposed to an upward movement signifying rebirth. Though death terrifies the speaker, he also shares hope that "rocky grave" (line 11) is not the last resting place but alludes to a transition stage from earthly life through resurrection to eternal life which is seen as 'bright and brave' (line 12), thus full of spiritual enlightenment and beyond nagging anxiety.

Moreover, in death all humans become equal and spiritually transparent; therefore, "clear as glass" (line 8) before God. In Lotman's framework, nature could be considered as systems of signs. In other words, natural phenomena can act as signs reflecting spiritual matters. The poet applies these signs and imposes the idea of spiritual rebirth which is granted by God and manifested in natural signs. Hence, the waterfall becomes a sign applied by Vaughan who "incorporates into his poem the symbolism of water as a means of cleansing and rebirth" (Brackett 2008, 455). In the beginning of the poem, the poet concentrates on the aesthetic quality of the waterfall which later acquires theological significance.

In Stanza Two, the speaker further addresses the waterfall and the bank by using apostrophes:

Dear stream! dear bank! where often I
Have sat, and pleased my pensive eye;
Why, since each drop of thy quick store
Runs thither whence it flow'd before,
Should poor souls fear a shade or night,
Who came—sure—from a sea of light?
Or, since those drops are all sent back
So sure to Thee that none doth lack,
Why should frail flesh doubt any more
That what God takes He'll not restore?[139]

(lines 13-22)

Thus the waterfall and the bank of the stream, are addressed and become the interlocutors involved in the poet's contemplation. The waterfall is used as an instrument by which the author experiences the divine. Vaughan adopts the hermetic view of the world which holds that "the created world is unendingly rejuvenated through infinite cycles, with its constant return to its source of cosmic energy" (Brackett 2008, 456). Hence, an examination of the cyclical nature of water inspires the speaker to ponder on his spiritual transformation. In the first line, he addresses the waterfall as a running stream which refers to a continuous flow of water after the final fall but also to the process of meditative reasoning. Thus, the speaker depicts his observations concerning the waterfall and simultaneously gives reflections about death and resurrection.

The poet's knowledge of the formation of the waterfall allows him to wonder why its water is eventually turning upstream from where it flowed before. Indeed, when water drops over the overhang, it creates a plunge pool in the soft rock below which causes erosion and eventually the collapse of the overhang. When this happens, the waterfall naturally retreats upstream.[140] Another interpretation could be related to the cyclical movement of water, i.e. its evaporation and condensation. Whatever it is, it provides a stimulus for Vaughan's spiritual contemplation on regeneration. The speaker questions whether people who were created by God and thus "came from the sea of light" (line 16) should be afraid of death viewed by the poet as "a shade or night" (line 17), since they will be brought back to life? The question that troubles the speaker most of all is whether God will restore what He has taken?

[139] VAUGHAN, H. *The Waterfall*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/vaughan/waterfall.htm

[140] Waterfall formation. Available at: http://www.alevelgeography.com/waterfalls/

Will a mortal body that is taken by God at death be restored by an eternal resurrected body?

In the last stanza the speaker celebrates nature which reveals to him the divine and offers hope of redemption:

> *O useful element and clear!*
> *My sacred wash and cleanser here;*
> *My first consigner unto those*
> *Fountains of life, where the Lamb goes!*
> *What sublime truths and wholesome themes*
> *Lodge in thy mystical, deep streams!*
> *Such as dull man can never find,*
> *Unless that Spirit lead his mind,*
> *Which first upon thy face did move*
> *And hatch'd all with His quick'ning love.*
> *As this loud brook's incessant fall*
> *In streaming rings restagnates all,*
> *Which reach by course the bank, and then*
> *Are no more seen: just so pass men.*
> *O my invisible estate,*
> *My glorious liberty, still late!*
> *Thou art the channel my soul seeks,*
> *Not this with cataracts and creeks.*[141]
>
> (lines 23-40)

The stanza proceeds with another apostrophe, i.e. an address to the waterfall, accentuating its sacred quality of cleansing. It indicates Baptism as the first spiritual experience of the speaker who expresses his longing for spiritual purification wishing to go "where the Lamb goes" (line 26). The Lamb signifies Christ who died and resurrected which suggests that all the people will follow this path and resurrect but first they have to repent their sins and be forgiven or cleanse. Hence, the Lamb embodies forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation which the speaker seeks. He yearns to understand "sublime truths and wholesome themes" (line 27) or gain superior knowledge, spiritual enlightenment which are not accessible to everyone but only those who go through spiritual rebirth. Similarly, not all the readers might perceive the enigmatic insights or "mystical, deep streams" (line 28) as hidden perspective of this poem since it can be decoded only by those who have proper codes.

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[141] VAUGHAN, H. *The Waterfall*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/vaughan/waterfall.htm

Further on, the Christian speaker admits that he too would not be able to come to this contemplation entirely on his own: it is the Holy Spirit that leads him. Water and spirit are purposefully highlighted since, in Jesus's words (John 3:5): "unless a person is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"[142]. Yet, in order to enter God's kingdom, men must die just like the streaming rings that disappear when they reach the shore. Here, the brook shore might suggest "safety; the dividing line between different worlds, such as life/death, body/spirit, conscious/unconscious" (Olderr 2012, 183). Hence, the brook could be understood as a boundary which, according to Lotman, is "the most important topological feature of space" since it "divides the entire space of the text into two mutually non-intersecting subspaces" (1977, 229). The scholar maintains that "this division can be between insiders and outsiders, between the living and the dead, between rich and poor" (1977, 230). Accordingly, the poet envisions the brook as a border between the world of the living and the world of the dead which prompts him to use another apostrophe. This time the speaker is not addressing the waterfall. Instead the poet applies apostrophe to address death itself:

> *O my invisible estate,*
> *My glorious liberty, still late!*
> *Thou art the channel my soul seeks,*
> *Not this with cataracts and creeks.* [143]
>
> (lines 37-40)

The poet realises that he has observed everything around what could be seen with his own eyes, yet death and afterlife are beyond seeing and can only be imagined. Therefore, they are an "invisible estate" (line 37). Thus what the speaker can do is impatiently wait for his "glorious liberty" (line 38) or death which frees him from a mundane burdensome existence. Water operates as a channel through which human soul can reach regeneration, therefore, the speaker does not want to settle on anything less (e.g. *cataracts and creeks* (line 40)). The last line involves a pun on the noun 'cataract' since it can be understood in two ways. Firstly, it can denote "a large waterfall,"[144] and stand in opposition to the creek as a narrow, small stream of water. Secondly, it might pertain to a medical condition which affects eyes, they become white

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[142] John *3:5*. Available at BibleGateway:
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+3&version=NET
[143] VAUGHAN, H. *The Waterfall*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/vaughan/waterfall.htm
[144] MACMILLAN DICTIONARY. Available at:
http://www.macmillandictionary.com/us/dictionary/american/cataract

and a person gradually loses his vision"[145]. Thus the speaker comes to the conclusion that he wants to see everything clearly, i.e. have spiritual insight. Yet he will gain it only after the resurrection.

The wit of the poem resonates in the apostrophes but also in other literary devices (e.g. metaphor, pun etc.). It also enables the poet to communicate his sensations through the shape and the content of the poem. The former is driven by a visual poetic evidence corresponding to the precise descriptions of the waterfall. Vaughan finds pleasure not only in seeing but also in perceiving the nature of the waterfall and is able to intimately connect with it. The pious potential of wit is exhausted as it becomes a natural signifier of the poet's spiritual quest. Wit is integral to the creative vision of the poet since it is used to translate one state into another. Conveyed through apostrophes literary wit allows the author to explore spiritual renewal which is seen as a cyclical process of nature. Waterfall turns to be the geomorphic stimulus for Vaughan's poetic contemplation and a motivation for the reader to gaze intently and devote close attention while communicating with the Metaphysical text. The insights on the formation of the waterfall provide the poet with a new dimension of spiritual experience. In a similar manner, the reader acquires poetic and spiritual apprehension deciphering Vaughan's poetic wit.

3.2.6. Antithesis

Among other devices used by the poets to construct literary wit is **antithesis**. It involves "fundamentally, contrasting ideas" which are "sharpened by the use of opposite or noticeably different meanings" (Cuddon 2013, 45). In other words, antithesis denotes a strong contrast between two corresponding members, usually antonyms. Hence, literary wit expressed by antithesis is based on lexical opposition. As proposed by Cuddon, when antithesis is applied and some objects, images or ideas are antithetically compared, they become more evident and in this way a more striking contrast is offered for the reader. Therefore, a witty antithesis is provoking as well as convincing. For instance, Crashaw invokes antithesis in his hymn *In the Holy Nativity of Our Lord God* (1646) to highlight that all the natural order has changed when Christ was born:

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[145] Ibid.

Welcome, all wonders in one sight!
Eternity shut in a span;
Summer in winter; day in night;
Heaven in earth, and God in man.
Great little one, whose all-embracing birth
Lifts earth to heaven, stoops heav'n to earth.[146]

<div align="right">(lines 87-92)</div>

It could be observed from the excerpt given above that a string of opposing elements is introduced for a contrasting effect: summer/winter, day/night, heaven/earth, God/man, lifts/stoops. This means that the poem as a semiotic text is articulated by the differences of its meaningful antithetic elements. The wit of a chain of antitheses based on paradoxes lies in the fact that even though they are opposing terms they are still mutually connected which means that decoding of one of them presupposes the actualisation of the other while the witty message of the author is generated by their cumulative interpretation. As noted by Lotman, "the meaning of the elements arises in their relation to each other" (1977, 40). The scholar states that "historical and ethnical linguistic models of space become the bases of organization for the construction of a "picture of the world" – an integral conceptual model inherent to a given type of culture"; whereas "individual spatial models created by a text or group of texts become meaningful against the background of these constructions" (ibid., 218). This means that any artistic text is "perceived against the background of, and in conflict with, the entire set of models of the universe that are active for the reader and the author" (ibid., 196). Thus, by using paradoxical antitheses, the poet displays his spatial composition of the world and focuses the reader's attention from one opposing element to the other in order to transmit his idea that the birth of Christ is an enigmatic change to all the spheres of life, especially human.

Crashaw creates the model of a vertically orientated universal system where the opposition top vs bottom is understood in terms of the system good vs evil. Accordingly, God vs man and heaven vs earth, but also in terms of light vs darkness or day vs night as well as heat vs cold or summer vs winter. In this universal system the top represents spirituality as opposed to the bottom which denotes materiality (see Lotman 1977, 218). The antithetic parallel plays a significant modelling role within the poem since it establishes the

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[146] CRASHAW, R. *In the Holy Nativity of Our Lord God*. Available at Poetry Foundation: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44058/in-the-holy-nativity-of-our-lord

spatial structures of the poet's world system. In this vertical system, the top or God and Heaven is frequently associated with distance, and the bottom or man and earth with nearness (ibid., 221). In this respect, a vertical system could also be comprehended in terms of moral codes. Thus, the bottom constitutes vice and the top, virtue. Therefore, salvation is perceived as a vertical upward movement. Consequently, the birth of Christ gains exceptional prominence since it reunites the opposing poles of the poet's structuring of the world possible by lifting earth to heaven and lowering heaven to earth. The connection is invoked through paradoxes, (seeing *all wanders in one sight* or *eternity shut in one span*) which are self-contradictory statements. While wit revealed by antithesis manifests through a balanced contrast which involves an opposition of coherent elements; paradox does not rely on antonyms and rather draws sense from the absurdity or impossibility of the statement. Yet in this case both work together and reveal the wonder as well as joy of the shepherds evidencing the Nativity.

A similar light vs darkness antithesis is evident in Crashaw's epigram *But Men Loved Darkness Rather than Light* (1646). An epigram, or "a short, witty statement in verse or prose" was "a form much cultivated in the 17th c. in England" (Cuddon 2013, 242). The brevity of epigram allowed the poet to deliver a striking succession of the momentary antithesis involving the most active cultural oppositions. The very title of the poem introduces the antithesis of darkness vs light which is further elaborated within the poem:

> *The world's light shines, shine as it will,*
> *The world will love its darkness still.*
> *I doubt though when the world's in hell,*
> *It will not love its darkness half so well.*[147]

As noted above, the antithesis light vs darkness, or heaven vs hell simultaneously organises the ethical space. The poem could be understood as Crashaw's *translation* of John 3: 19-21 in which light refers to Christ the Saviour of the World and thus Salvation in general; whereas darkness stands for sins:

Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever

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[147] CRASHAW, R. *But Men Loved Darkness Rather than Light*. Available at Poetry Foundation: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44051/but-men-loved-darkness-rather-than-light

lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God. [148]

The poet treats light as a symbol of "immateriality, spirit, and God" and juxtaposes it with darkness which frequently "appears as a symbol of ignorance and spiritual dullness" (Becker 2000, 177). The speaker expresses disappointment that, though God has sent Christ, the light of righteousness, to the world, humanity is still submerged in the darkness of their sins. They are afraid to reveal their immoral nature in the light of God, repent and plead for mercy and instead have chosen to remain sinful.

Crashaw invokes the antithesis of light vs darkness to warn that Salvation is not possible without sincere repentance urging humanity to turn to light before it is too late. The opposition enables the author to reveal the contents of his idea. It also corresponds to the spatial opposition of top vs bottom, or Heaven vs Hell (see Becker 2000, 177; Lotman 1977, 218). Hence, the antithesis light vs darkness is superimposed on the opposition heaven vs hell. Accordingly, the speaker makes a sarcastic observation that, though sinners may love their immoral way of life now, once in Hell, they will have to repay for their evil doings, and, therefore, they will not love their darkness half as much as they used to in earthly life: "The idea of an ascent from darkness to light plays an important role for many peoples with respect to the development of humanity as well as to that of the individual" (Becker 2000, 177). Thus the reader is also invited to evaluate his conduct and devotion during the process of deciphering the literary wit of the poem.

Reasoning on the genuineness of religious devotion is also present in Vaughan's poem *The Retreat* (1655) where the speaker reminiscences about his childhood or, as he calls it, his "angel infancy" (line 2). He remembers it as a time when he was innocent and did not know what sin was. Now he is a grown up and not as morally pure anymore, therefore, he is longing to come back:

> *O how I long to travel back,*
> *And tread again that ancient track!*
> *That I might once more reach that plain,*
> *Where first I left my glorious train;*
> *From whence th' enlighten'd spirit sees*
> *That shady City of palm-trees.[149]*
>
> (lines 22-27)

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[148] John 3: 17-21. Availabe at BibleGateway: https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+3%3A17-21&version=NIV

[149] VAUGHAN, H. *The Retreat*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/vaughan/retreat.htm

The speaker imagines himself when he was a child, standing in the plain and having a vision of the celestial city. Thus, the city becomes a semiotic space in the poet's creative vision. This alludes to the Deuteronomy 34:1-4 which depicts Moses just before his death:

> Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the Lord showed him the whole land —from Gilead to Dan, all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Mediterranean Sea, the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar. Then the Lord said to him, "This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it.[150]

Perhaps the speaker identifies himself with Moses who was able to see the promised land but has never reached it. Therefore, he admits that "some men a forward motion love, / But I by backward steps would move"[151] (lines 29-30). Here the author applies antithesis to show the contrast between the speaker and some men. He highlights that some people prefer to think about the future, they look forward to what is coming next in their life; whereas the speaker, on the contrary, clings to the past, indulges in nostalgia for an innocent childhood when he was sinless and thus, in his opinion, closer to God. Therefore, the title of the poem, *The Retreat*, could be understood in two ways: as "a private and safe place"[152] which for the speaker is his childhood; or as "a period of time used to pray and study quietly, or to think carefully, away from normal activities and duties"[153]. Thus, the first meaning pertains to a safe location; while the other denotes the speaker's withdrawal. At the same time, the antithesis denotes the movement in time from the present to the past. On this time vector, the past signifies childhood and innocence, hence, a moral state of being in contrast to the present situation, i.e. the speaker's adulthood when he is corrupted by immoral acts. Naturally, the speaker wants to withdraw from the experience of the present into an idyllic retreat to the past as the lost Paradise.

It could be observed that literary wit in the analysed cases is not accidental or used as an embellishment but rather as a calculated poetic move to enhance an emotional quality of the poems and reveal an individual structuring of the poet's world. Communicated by antithesis and paradox, literary wit delivers a

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[150] Deuteronomy 34:1-4. Available at BibleGateway: https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy+34%3A1-4&version=NIV
[151] VAUGHAN, H. *The Retreat*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/vaughan/retreat.htm
[152] CDO. Available at: http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/retreat
[153] Ibid.

strong contrast, puts emphasis on an opposition of ideas and in such a way acts as a persuasive instrument of poetic communication which highlights not only spatial and temporal modelling but also the organisation of the author's moral system.

3.2.7. Irony

Literary wit expressed by **irony** focuses on the semantic opposition of a statement. The poet expresses his ironic view towards the literal meaning of an idea or a statement. However, for the literary wit conveyed through irony to be decoded the reader must have a socio-cultural knowledge shared with the author. In other words, irony can only work as a mutual accomplishment of the ironist and the decoder of the wit. Though in Classical times irony was understood as "a manner of discourse in which, for the most part, the meaning was contrary to the words", in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, it was regarded a "as a mode of thinking, feeling and expression" which started to achieve "a high degree of sophistication" (Cuddon 2013, 371). Thus, irony become a device through which writers could showcase their ingenuity and reveal the climate of opinions which prevailed during the seventeenth century.

Sometimes witty discourse conveyed through irony might seem quite innocent and even flirtatious. For instance, in Marvell's poem *To His Coy Mistress* (1681), a classic carpe diem poem, the quick-witted speaker delivers his persuasive argumentation why his shy young mistress should not restrain herself from making love with him. It could be said that the coy "mistress" in this poem represents the so-called *naïve hero* "whose invincible simplicity or obtuseness leads him to persist in putting an interpretation on affairs which the knowing reader—who penetrates to, and shares, the implied point of view of the authorial presence behind the naive persona—just as persistently is called on to alter and correct" (Abrams, Harpham 2012, 185). The witty irony is observed when the speaker is telling to his lady one thing while really implying another, which is frequently the opposite.

The true ironic intention of the lover is to change his modest mistress's attitude and seduce her. Thus, when he suggests that the lady should refuse his courting: "And you should, if you please, refuse / Until the conversion of the Jews"[154] (lines 9-10), he obviously does not mean it. One of the leading arguments which the speaker develops is that time to love is very limited in human life. This way Marvell parodies the Courtier writers who claimed love to be eternal (see section 4.2.8). The poet applies hyperbole for this purpose

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[154] MARVELL, A. *To His Coy Mistress*. Available at Poetry Foundation: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44688/to-his-coy-mistress

when the speaker claims that each of the lady's bodily parts should be admired for a long time: a hundred years for her eyes and forehead, two hundred for her breasts, thirty thousand to the rest of her body, an age for each part, especially her heart. He finishes his hyperbolical string with an ironic statement: "For, lady, you deserve this state, / Nor would I love at lower rate"[155] (lines 19-20). It is another case of covert irony since what the speaker states will never happen as human life is limited, nor that he would wish to even behave like this. His witty discourse is aimed at the mistress in order to change her belief that sexual intercourse before marriage is forbidden and urge her to engage into physical consummation as soon as possible. To do that he needs to please his lady and gain her trust in order to entice her sexually. Therefore, he constructs this unrealistic situation where their love is eternal and he can prove it by devoting hundred or more years to each bodily part of his beloved, just to turn this situation around and pretend he is deeply disappointed with reality, i.e. that life is short and time is, in fact, fleeting away even as they speak. Therefore, this irony could be seen as a decoy of sweet words and witty argumentation to persuade the mistress not to waste time and respond to her lover's amorous advances.

The reader who follows the speaker's communication with his mistress through the entire poem can notice that in the beginning irony is more covert; whereas towards the end it becomes more provocative and even aggressive. In the first half of the poem the poet centres on the unrealistic or even utopian visions encompassing time and space extensions; while in the second half of the poem, he focuses on reality and therefore shifts to the motif of death to accentuate the limited nature of time that is given to them. It is worth remembering, Lotman's ideas about a special semantic role of death in human life in the following way:

> The beginning-end and death are inextricably linked to the possibility of understanding the reality of life as something which may be comprehended. The tragic contradiction between the infinity of life as such, and the finite nature of human life, is only one particular manifestation of the more drastic contradiction between that which lies beyond the categories of life and death – between the genetic code and the individual existence of the organism. From the very moment that individual existence is converted into conscious existence (the existence of consciousness), this contradiction is transformed from a characteristic anonymous process into the tragic property of human life (2004a, 162).

The scholar also claims that death is much more significant when it is linked to such notions as "youth, health and beauty – i.e. in cases of violent death: the connection with free will lends an optimum semantic loading to this theme"

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[155] Ibid.

(ibid., 163). Marvell ingeniously connects the theme of death with notions of youth, beauty and innocence which provides him the basis for an effective ironic argument used to intimidate his mistress as he declares: "The grave's a fine and private place / But none, I think, do there embrace"[156] (lines 31-32). This way the poet ironically elevates the grave - bed parallel for both of the lovers could be viewed as private but not necessarily fine places. At the same time, he delivers a fatal threat to prolonged virginity thus suggesting that if the lady waits too long she might die and at that point she will not be appealing to anyone to court her. It is important to mention that irony as a device is not self-sufficient, therefore, it invokes other devices such as metaphor, simile, conceit, hyperbole etc. to reach the desired effect. This particular poem is very rich in witty expression which is also manifested through other devices, thus it will be further analysed in sections 3.2.8 and 3.2.10.

Sometimes wit conveyed by irony may also bear a derisive tone. It can be used to mock another person or idea. This happens when a witty ironic statement contains "the explicit expression of one attitude or evaluation, but with indications in the overall speech-situation that the speaker intends a very different, and often opposite, attitude or evaluation" (Abrams, Harpham 2012, 185). Such use of wit could be seen in the works of the Restoration poet John Dryden whose greatest achievements lie in the satiric verse. As mentioned above, irony is not a self-sufficient device, therefore when it is used in satiric discourse it gains even more power, though decoding of such wit-laden poetry is more complicated.

Dryden's satire *Mac Flecknoe: A Satire upon the True-blue Protestant Poet T.S.* (1682) is directed towards another writer Thomas Shadwell (1642–1692) who is presented in the poem as a successor of Richard Flecknoe (1600–1678), another target of the poet's satire. The issues between Dryden and other two poets which led to their feud and further satiric poetry were summarised by Oden in this way:

> (1) their different estimates of the genius of Ben Jonson, (2) the preference of Dryden for comedy of wit and repartee and of Shadwell, the chief disciple of Jonson, for humorous comedy, (3) a sharp disagreement over the true purpose of comedy, (4) contention over the value of rhymed plays, and (5) plagiarism (Oden 1977, ix).

Paul Hammond explains that Dryden's poem is "directed against that misuse of classicism which unites Flecknoe and Shadwell: their nominal attachment to Horace or to Jonson or to Moliere is but a travesty of true classical values and practices, and must have been particularly irritating to Dryden at a time when

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[156] MARVELL, A. *To His Coy Mistress*. Available at Poetry Foundation: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44688/to-his-coy-mistress

he was trying to fashion in his own work an art which was truly classical for his own times without being merely an aping of his predecessors" (2006, 170). Hence, it is natural that Dryden wrote the poem in a mock-heroic manner adopted when the poet wanted "to make a trivial subject seem grand in such a way as to satirize the style" (Cuddon 2013, 441). He purposefully uses elevated yet ironic tone to depict the two characters which creates a comic effect.

It should be stressed though that the ironic wit of the poem depends on the reader's contextual knowledge. This knowledge embraces not only the "immediately neighbouring signs" given in the poem, its certain parts or the whole remaining text, but might also include "biographical, social, cultural, and historical circumstances in which it is made" (Baldick 2001, 50). The meaning of literary wit which is conveyed through irony can change completely just by the knowledge of its context. Lotman states that "the capacity of a textual element to enter into several contextual structures and to take on different meaning in each context is one of the most profound properties of the artistic text" (1977, 59-60). Therefore, the deciphering of literary wit which occurs during artistic communication is possible only if the author's code and the reader's code form "intersecting sets of structural elements" (ibid., 25). In other words, there must be a correlation between "the synthetic artistic code of the author" and "the analytic code of the reader" (ibid.). In the case of this particular poem, the reader needs to know that the author despises Flecknoe and Shadwell, the literary context of the time but also other contexts which are incorporated into the poem. For instance, the aesthetic effect of wit in the beginning of the poem relies on the reader's knowledge of the Imperial Roman historic context:

> *All humane things are subject to decay,*
> *And when Fate Summons, Monarch's must obey;*
> *This Flecknoe found, who like Augustus young,*
> *Was call'd to Empire, and had Govern'd long;*
> *Through all the realms of Non-sense, absolute.*
> *This aged prince now flourishing in peace,*
> *And blest with issue of a large increase,*
> *Worn out with business, did at length debate*
> *To settle the succession of the State:*
> *And pond'ring which of all his sons was fit*
> *To reign, and wage immortal war with wit.*[157]
>
> (lines 1-12)

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[157] DRYDEN, J. *Mac Flecknoe*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/dryden1.html

Here Flecknoe is ironically compared to Augustus Octavius who was the Roman imperator from 27 BC until AD 14. Brackett notes that "the reference to Augustus recalls Julius Caesar's choice of Octavius, later called Augustus, as his successor" (2008, 262). Octavius was an adopted son of Julius Caesar which made him his primary heir. Dryden intentionally selects such a historical context since Flecknoe has frequently considered himself to be the successor of Jonson. Hence, such comparison gives him basis to express an ironic view towards Flecknoe's literary status. The poet invokes this comparison to humiliate rather than to praise Flecknoe since while Augustus controlled the Roman Empire, Flecknoe is said to be the monarch governing the domains of utter silliness. Thus, it could be said that he was the ruler of graphomania since, according to Hammond (2006, 168), "Flecknoe was for Dryden's contemporaries the epitome of the bad poet".

To decode the message of the author the reader needs to apply his contextual or gained knowledge. He has to spot the inconsistency of the compared characters which was very obvious for the seventeenth-century readers. Though it might seem that Dryden is exalting Flecknoe when comparing him to the emperor Augustus, the ironic view becomes clear when the reader grasps that Flecknoe's empire "of Non-sense" is nowhere close to the wealth and grandeur of the Roman Empire. Thus, by literary wit which conveys an obvious incompatibility of the compared (i.e. the emperor Augustus and Shadwell, the Roman Empire and the empire of Non-sence), the poet reveals his biting satire. The ironic contrast is extended when the poet calls Flecknoe a prince, depicts him being very successful financially and presents to the readers the issue which Flecknoe deals with, i.e. choosing an heir to rule his Empire and carry on his battle with wit. The text also contains an observation concerning wit. The poet admits that there is disagreement about literary wit. The epithet "immortal" points to the idea that it has been going for quite some time and does not seem to stop. Indeed, both poets had a different understanding of wit and each of them passionately defended their case. The opposition of their attitudes is disclosed in *A Session of the Poets* (1676) by John Wilmot in which Dryden is described as an "ancient grave wit" (lines 9-10) while Shadwell as a "jovial wit"[158] (line 33) following the Jonsonian tradition of wit.

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[158] WILMONT, J. *A Session of the Poets*. Available at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.208065/2015.208065.Collected-Works_djvu.txt

The succeeding lines once again present the statements which play on the friction of the opposites. Flecknoe deliberates who his successor should be and decides to claim someone who resembles him most, i.e. Shadwell:

Shad---[159]alone my perfect Image Bears,
Mature in Dulness from his Tender Years;
Shad--- alone of all my Sons, is He
Who stands confirm'd in full Stupidity.[160]

(lines 15-18)

Once again, the readers are twisted by the poet's ironic wit which is placed structurally so that it would strike at the very end of the statement. The first line of the excerpt given above seems to be conveying a 'perfect Image' of Flecknoe's successor which is then twisted into resemblance based on dullness. The epithets "perfect", "mature" and "confirmed" suggest that the poet is praising Shadwell but once they are juxtaposed with "dullness" and "stupidity" the wit of the ironic attitude emerges. Hence, Dryden applies witty expression as the confrontation of the opposites: "mature in Dulness" (line 16) and "confirm'd in full Stupidity" (line 18). The phrases present a combination of two words whose meanings are mutually contradicting, since, as a rule, people tend to think that someone who is mature behaves in a sensible way which is expected from adults, or has developed skills[161], but not of the one who has developed a high level of stupidity, or "full Stupidity" (line 16), as Dryden puts it. The literary wit of the poem lies in the lexical and structural manoeuvres which let the poet's critique function by making the readers believe (at least for a short while) that it is a praise. Thus, it could be stated that irony is an effective way to express wit, yet sometimes as a device it is not self-efficient and includes other devices as well. The discourse of literary wit is able to store a complex and diverse information; therefore, it requires multiple and frequently overlapping devices to communicate its essence.

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[159] In the first publication of the poem, Dryden used only 'Sh' to refer to Shadwell in order to protect the identity of his victim but also to stimulate some scalological interpretations of the poem. In later revisions of the poem the writer used "Shad---,, instead, while the modernized spelling of the poem frequently gives the full last name 'Shadwell'.

[160] DRYDEN, J. *Mac Flecknoe*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/dryden1.html

[161] ED. Available at: http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=dullness

3.2.8. Parody

As has already been mentioned in the previous section, literary wit can also be articulated through **parody**. As noted by Manson (1966, 16), it is applied to deride a particular literary work or style. As parody involves communication between two texts – the one that is parodied and the one which makes a parody, literary wit becomes more complex. It relies on the synthesis of two texts and requires the reader/interpreter to get engaged into a communicative act with both of them as well as with their context in order to recognize and decode the meaning of wit. Parody could be described as an imitation of a particular literary form or content with a critical posture which might be positive (aiming to correct) or negative (aiming to deride) (Cuddon 2013, 514). This means that the poet who constructs parody inverts the primary idea, transfusing it with his own perspective. To decipher literary wit expressed through parody the reader has to work out a second meaning through some specific clues which might be incorporated by the author, or acquire the required knowledge from the context. Lotman maintains that while structuring parody the author applies "certain elements in the construction of the work to evoke in the reader's consciousness a structure which will then be destroyed" (1977, 293). In other words, the poet imitates the structure of the work he seeks to parody as a hint to the reader to the target of the parody and once this target is established the structure is destroyed throughout the employment of literary wit.

A keen eye could spot several cases of parody in Marvell's poem *To His Coy Mistress*. As mentioned above, it parodies the Cavalier poetry, its overly romantic tone and idealised portrayal of love. The seventeenth-century parody aims to outdo the original poem by using witty patterns and showcase the creative skills of the chosen poets. However, in order to do that the poet has to provide reasonable witty arguments which should be persuasive enough to impress the readers more than the poem which is being mocked. This section will proceed with the exploration of how Marvell applies wit to deride Cowley's poems *My Dyet* (1647) and *Against Fruition* (1656).

In *My Dyet* (2014, 89), the speaker pleads his lady to believe in his love and dramatically surrenders to her as a faithful servant asserting that he will not eat anything and survive on his diet (lines 15-21) which consists of the following:

> *On'a Sigh of Pity I a year can live,*
> *One Tear will keep me twenty'at least,*
> *Fifty a gentle Look will give;*
> *An hundred years on one kind word I'll feast:*
> *A thousand more will added be,*
> *If you an Inclination have for me;*
> *And all beyond is vast Eternity.*
> (lines 15-21)

Contrary to Cowley's speaker who believes that he can gain eternity if his mistress will answer his love, Marvell's lover in the poem *To His Coy Mistress* applies his wit to put forward the idea that infinity is not given to people, thus they should not waste their time and establish a sexual relation right away. The excerpt below captures the rush of time and inevitability of death that is stressed by the speaker:

> *But at my back I always hear*
> *Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;*
> *And yonder all before us lie*
> *Deserts of vast eternity.*[162]
> (lines 21-24)

The "vast Eternity" (line 21) which is depicted by Cowley as the lover's driving ambition is shifted by Marvell in a witty way into the "deserts of vast eternity" (line 24) that are out of reach for the lovers when death is approaching fast. Wit conveyed through parody invokes specific time and space systems. Time is portrayed through the mythological consciousness as Cronus, the God of time who was frequently depicted riding a chariot with a scythe in his hand (Roman, Roman 2010, 121). In love poetry, time is frequently featured as the enemy of lovers since it brings death and decay. It should be stressed that the very position of the personified time is also significant. It is located at the back of the speaker (*But at my back I always hear* (line 21)) which suggests that the lovers cannot predict when time will catch up with them since they cannot see it but they can always sense its presence. Moreover, time's winged chariot is faster than the lovers, thus they should hurry.

If time is at the back, death and afterlife, as the poet suggests, is in front (*before us lie* (line 23)) of the lovers as "deserts of vast eternity" (line 24).

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162 MARVELL, A. *To His Coy Mistress*. Available at Poetry Foundation:
     https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44688/to-his-coy-mistress

Thus, death is portrayed by the application of spatial realisation, as a desert which stands as an antithesis to civilisation, as periphery in opposition to the city as the centre. Lotman proposes that the Heaven – Hell opposition the degree of climate and goodness are closely linked: "In paradise the soil is rich and everything grows in abundance, while in hell the climate makes life impossible, it is a land of ice and fire" (Lotman 1990, 73). In this respect, deserts might be regarded as infertile lands which is a daunting afterlife prospect for the lovers. Hence, Marvell takes Cowley's projection of time and eternity in a mocking manner and this way outmanoeuvres him with his wit. While Cowley suggests that lovers have "vast Eternity" to take pleasure in their love, Marvell claims that what lovers have is, in fact, a momentary happiness between the time in winged chariot and the desert. Hence, vastness of time in Cowley's poem is originally modified by Marvell into spatial vastness as a tiring experience of the desert.

Marvell also parodies the manner in which the Courtier poets dedicated their poems to the separate parts of a female body turning them into objects of admiration. This could be clearly seen where he hyperbolically highlights that two hundred years should be devoted to adore each breast of his mistress:

An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast,
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart.[163]
<div align="center">(lines 13-18)</div>

Here Marvell takes an extract from Cowley's other poem *Against Fruition* (2014, 98) as the target for his parody. Cowley moralises against libertine love and consummation. He employs a witty simile for his argument in favour of chastity stating that "Love, like a greedy hawk, if we give way, / Does overgorge himself with his own prey" (lines 27-28). It suggests that uncontrolled passion and lust may have severe consequences. The poet alludes to disgust of surfeit to discourage the lovers and prevent them from sexual activity and lust. According to William Ian Miller (1997, 110), "the overindulgence in any number of foods, drinks, and activities, sexual or otherwise, for which the desire is completely conscious and acted upon, leads to disgust also – the nausea and sickness of surfeit". Thus, disgust is a

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[163] MARVELL, A. *To his Coy Mistress*. Available at Poetry Foundation: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44688/to-his-coy-mistress

punishment for overeating or, as the author notes, "a time-activated barrier that judges (usually too slowly) when enough has been enough" (ibid.). Hence, "the disgust of surfeit makes the once alluring now disgusting" (ibid., 114). However, Marvell transforms Cowley's idea in a completely different way:

Now let us sport us while we may,
And now, like amorous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour
Than languish in his slow-chapped power.[164]
(lines 37-40)

The poet turns Cowley's wit around and enhances it by viewing the lovers as two mating vultures. The speaker urges the mistress to hasten and consume time as their prey and enjoy the pleasures of love instead of suffering under the slow pressure of time. Marvell's literary wit might be based on the myth of god of time Cronus devouring his children in fear of being destined to be overruled by them (Roman, Roman 2012, 221). This myth was extended to Cronus eating days and ages. For instance, in the philosophical work *De Natura Deorum* written in 45 BC Cicero claims that Cronus "devours the ages and gorges himself insatiably with the years that are past"[165]. In this line time is depicted in relation to death. Marvell works out an allusion to the passage from Isaiah 5:14 where death is viewed as a devourer of people: "Therefore Death expands its jaws, / opening wide its mouth;/ into it will descend their nobles and masses / with all their brawlers and revellers" [166]. Thus Marvell's wit seeks to communicate the idea that time passes fast and brings death. Therefore, instead of being slowly consumed by time, the lovers should themselves greedily devour time. In Cowley's poem love is depicted as "a greedy hawk" that gluttonises on sex as its pray; while in Marvell's witty parody the lovers are themselves "amorous birds" who devour time as devourer together with their pray.

The poet's wit brings the intensity to the poem by shifting the very perspective of time depiction: Cowley assumes that time is never ending, thus there is plenty of time for wooing since love can last all eternity; whereas Marvell stresses that time is very limited and cruel towards the lovers. Moreover, his speaker urges his mistress to outplay the time by consumption which is related to sexual consummation. Thus Marvell is also transforming

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[164] Ibid.
[165] CICERO, M. T. *De Natura Deorum*. Available at:
http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/cicero-on-the-nature-of-the-gods
[166] Isaiah 5:14. Available at BibleGateway:
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+5%3A14-16&version=NIV

the conventional poetic division between spiritual love and bodily love. Here the act of devouring a prey indicates an uncontrollable passion and wild mating which is physical and not spiritual. The poet applies the mythic patterns and changes within the cosmic flow of time to destroy the structure of Cowley's thought with the ingenious machinery of his Metaphysical wit.

Another author who incorporates wit expressed through parody is Donne. In his poem *The Flea* (1633), he parodies his contemporary poetry which uses the image of the flea as a literary topos. Evans claims that this poem "reflects a long heritage of texts about fleas, especially *poems* about fleas" (2015, 92). Among such poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, (e.g. the French poets Pierre de Ronsard (1524–1585), Catherine Fradonnet (1542–1587), the English poets Thomas Watson (1555–1592), William Drummond (1584 – 1649) and others) the flea is depicted as a small insect which can bite and cause itching or as an image to explore an erotic subject matter. Thus, Donne's poem "belongs to an extensive genre of poems in which the lover describes an animal that is able to explore his beloved's body to which he is denied access" (Hadfield 2006, 50). In such poems, the lover usually envies a flea its freedom to get close to a female body. Therefore, he is dreaming of being turned into a flea in order to sense the sexual intimacy with his beloved. For instance, Drummond admires the liberty which a flea possesses in his poem *The Happiness of a Flea* (Drummond 1790, 228): "How Happier is that Flea / Which in thy Breast doth play" (lines 1-2); or in his other poem under the title *On that Same* (ibid., 229) he depicts how a flea tried "A Lover's last Delight, / To vault on Virgin-plains, Her kiss, and bite" (lines 5-6). The lover seems to be taken over by his erotic fantasies that he is not afraid of being killed by a gentle hand of his beloved lady. This act of self-deprecation shows a passionate devotion and absolute loyalty to a beloved person. The speaker of the poem glorifies the flea comparing its death with a courageous downfall of a knight in a battle: "And if he die, he Knight-like dies in Blood" (line 8). Donne adopts this popular convention of the image of the flea but transforms it in his own way turning it into an object of his wit.

The poet presents a circular persuasive argument which focuses on the flea's activity as an excuse for conjugal relations. Donne takes the insect's ability of blood sucking as symbolic of sexual intimacy between the partners and creates a parody of the approach used by the earlier poets who attempted to convince virgins to engage into sex. For instance, Ben Jonson's *To Celia* (1616), *To the Same* (1616), Thomas Carew's *To A.L. The Persuasions to Love* (1640) or Robert Herrick's *To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time* (1648), Sir Hohn Suckling's *Love's Siege* (1646), Edmund Waller's *Go, Lovely Rose* (1645), *To Phyllis* and others.

In Donne's poem, the lady seems to deny a sexual intercourse to her lover; therefore, he attempts to change her mind. The poet constructs a witty argument starting with a comparison of the sin of engaging into a sexual act before marriage to the flea's biting: "Mark but this flea, and mark in this, / How little that which thou deniest me is"[167]. As a natural insect, the flea is taken by the poet to signify the maidenhead. The flea is a parasitic insect that feeds by sucking blood. Thus, Donne compares insect biting to the sexual intercourse. When the flea bites it pierces the skin which allows the poet to compare this act to penetration, while projecting mouthparts of the flea could also have phallic implications. Hence, the speaker in the poem is referring to the flea and its biting to suggest that his mistress maidenhood is just as the insect – a small matter, thus not that significant, and that losing her virginity will not hurt more than a flea bite. Moreover, he claims that since the flea has bit them both, their blood has already merged in its belly; therefore, the sexual intercourse between the speaker and his beloved has already taken place within the body of the flea: "It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee, / And in this flea our two bloods mingled be"[168] (lines 3-4). Murray Roston states that "there might have been a Renaissance belief that the act of sexual intercourse involved a mingling of two drops of blood", but he also suggests that, in Donne's case, it might refer to "the merging of the 'blood' of two family lineages within the offspring of the union" (2011, 92-93). Hence, the poet invokes an intricate conceit when the flea is compared to the lovers' bed since their blood, i.e. their genes got intermingled consequently alluding to a sexual intercourse. It is possible to see how Donne starts the poem in a conventional fashion of the flea poems (it involves the usual characters (the lover and his reluctant mistress) and the subject matter) however, he quickly changes the role of the image of the flea by creatively transforming it. This transformation lasts throughout the poem thus the reader is never allowed to forget about the flea's constant presence. At the same time, it makes the reader work hard in order to catch up with the poet's witty shifts of mind.

Donne's Metaphysical conceit combines the seemingly opposite ideas with internal logic. When the lady wishes to kill the flea, the lover tries to stop her, since the death of the flea would signify her negative answer. Hence, he wants to keep the insect alive until his arguments convince her to give consent. The speaker maintains that since their blood is intermingled inside the body of the flea, killing it would be equal to suicide and murder which are both grave sins:

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[167] DONNE, J. *The Flea*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/donne/flea.php

[168] DONNE, J. *The Flea*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/donne/flea.php

"stay, three lives in one flea spare, / Where we almost, yea, more than married are"[169] (lines 10-11). Donne also elaborates another argument that their marriage has already taken place and the flea represents it. Therefore, the flea is compared to the church where marriage sacrament is given: "This flea is you and I, and this / Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is"[170] (lines 12-13). The poet evokes a grotesque perspective in the poem which is an additional device to express literary wit. Donne is quick in his Baroque transitions where the flea is linked with the lovers, the bed and even the church. Literary wit emerges through parody in the poet's attempt, in Ronald Corthell's terms, "break away from Petrarchan discourse" (1997, 60). In his book *Ideology and Desire in Renaissance Poetry: The Subject of Donne* the critic states that to achieve it "a poetic norm of love – Petrarchism – must be evoked, placed hierarchically above the speaker's heresy, and then displaced in a reversing move by the speaker in order for the wit of the poem to have its effect" (ibid.). Thus, it could be observed that through his literary wit Donne exposes his rejection of the dominating cultural Courtier codes and structures. The effect of wit is achieved precisely due to the tension which results from the clash of the comparison of elements from two completely different systems. This conflict breaks down the automatism of the reader's perception and forces him to re-examine the lines anew.

As far as the structural transformation is concerned, this poem has three agents, i.e. the speaker, his beloved and a flea. In contrast to the Courtier poetry which centres on the two agents only. Moreover, here the male speaker takes the lead; however, he does not spend any time admiring the external characteristics of the lady or idealising the beloved as it was done in the Courtier poetry. Rather, his cooing takes a philosophical approach diverting the attention from the mistress to himself thus showcasing his rationale of witty arguments. Though it seems that the flea is introduced into this poem as a conventional Courtier code of love poetry, its meaning is shifted to completely different and unexpected directions. Hence, it could be stated that the Courtier code is overwritten with the Coterie[171] code.

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[169] Ibid.

[170] DONNE, J. *The Flea*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/donne/flea.php

[171] Donne is frequently ascribed to the coterie poets who devoted their poetry for the select rather than broad audiences. Marotti explains that Donne was "directing almost all of his verse and much of his prose to select, and known, audiences whose responses he could imagine and whose knowledge of him enabled them to bring the kind of interpretive nuances to the understanding of his work that a broad, anonymous readership might not have brought" (2008, v).

Donne's witty manoeuvres invoke conversion from an animated state to the inanimate one when the flea is compared to the church. When such an unexpected alteration occurs, the reader conversing with the text admires the ingenuity of invention but at the same time perceives the ugliness of the comparison since all the features which belong to the flea (its shape, small size and black colour) are transferred to the image of the church. Though the initially given parasitic grotesque comparison causes surprise and might provoke laughter, imagining the interplay of size and colour, i.e. imagining white church as black, the massive flea evoking fear and disgust. It evokes such emotions because the comparison violates the accepted norms of the reader. Miller claims that disgusting repents people but always catches their attention (1997, x). According to him, "it imposes upon us" (ibid.). In doing that it "involves particular thoughts, characteristically very intrusive and unriddable thoughts about the repugnance of that which is its object" as well as "ideas of a particular kind of danger" (ibid., 8). Therefore, Donne's distinct objects drawn together by fusing their exclusive characteristics evoke the reader's vivid emotional response.

Moreover, while the Courtier poets deliberate on the questions of sexual activity and religious prohibition with considerable caution, Donne boldly mixes the profane and the sacred planes – the flea representing the lowest of order of living organisms – a parasite, and the temple as the building where the marriage sacrament is given. Hence, the meaning-generating principle of wit in the poem lies in comparisons of the elements that are typically incomparable, however, their joint decoding enables diverse readings of the poem and uncovers a reservoir of unanticipated meanings. When the church is compared to the flea its sacredness is significantly profaned which shows the lover's true intention: he is not interested in marriage sacrament. His love is based on physical passion. Thus, it is clear that, contrary to his mistress, for him, the holy sacrament of marriage does not entail any significance.

Similarly to other poems involving the image of the flea, Donne's poem ends with the mistress killing the flea. The speaker calls his beloved pitiless for killing an innocent insect:

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since
Purpled thy nail in blood of innocence?
Wherein could this flea guilty be,
Except in that drop which it suck'd from thee?[172]

(lines 19-22)

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[172] DONNE, J. *The Flea*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/donne/flea.php

The woman does not seem to feel any remorse over this act: "Yet thou triumph'st, and say'st that thou / Find'st not thyself nor me the weaker now"[173] (lines 23-24). The lover applies her counterargument to his own advantage and delivers his final commentary that her fear to lose her honour while having a sexual relationship with him before marriage is false since she would not lose more honour when she did when killing the innocent flea: "Just so much honour, when thou yield'st to me, / Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee"[174].

As has been mentioned, the flea poems were a very popular genre during the seventeenth century, thus the readership of that time, especially the select, could easily understand that Donne was making a parody of this genre by transforming the image of the flea through resourceful witty conceits. In other words, for the seventeenth-century readers, deciphering the poem was an easier task since the codes employed by the author and the readers were very similar. However, the contemporary reader does not possess such, to put it in Bakhtinian terms, "genre memory" (1984, 87). Therefore, for the contemporary reader the decoding process is far more complicated. Parody depends a lot on the readers' knowledge of the target texts and a particular cultural context to be able to recognise that this is, in fact, a parody and then decode its message. Nevertheless, wit can only exist in the presence of the readership, therefore, as noted by Lotman, the text and the readership need to adapt to each other:

> Text and readership as it were seek mutual understanding. They 'adapt' to each other. A text behaves like a partner in dialogue: it re-orders itself (as far as its supply of structural indeterminacy allows) in the image of the readership. And the reader responds likewise, using his or her informational flexibility for the restructuring which will draw him or her closer to the world of the text. At this pole there is a relationship of tolerance on each side (1990, 80).

When the contemporary readers try to comprehend the message of the poem, they are required to devote more mental effort since the codes which are familiar to them may not work. But once the poetic message is decoded the reader can fully appreciate the author's parodic message which provides a broader perspective on the flea as an object of literary wit. Contrary to the Courtier poets, Donne does not treat it as an insect that he would like to incarnate into, but rather as a premise on which he can build his compelling argumentation which is witty. Thus he is not simply repeating the

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[173] ibid.
[174] DONNE, J. *The Flea*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/donne/flea.php

conventional topos, but reworking and modifying it into a completely new and original poetic expression of wit.

Allusion is a device of wit by which an evocative reference is made. It is based on the presumption that the reader as decoder will be able to recognise an object alluded to and its role in a poem. Lotman asserts that sometimes the readership of a literary text which involves allusions can be divided into two groups: one small group of readers who can understand the allusion because of their "detailed familiarity with extra-textual experiences" (1990, 67) that they share with the author; and another, wide group of readers who can suspect that artistic text alludes to something, but are not able to decode it. Thus, in order to understand the meaning of wit evoked by allusions, its literary and cultural context must be perceived. In this case, communication involves not only the author, his text and the reader but also a cultural tradition and collective cultural memory which are evoked to generate the meaning of wit as it might have been forgotten or not known to the contemporary reader.

The poetic text which invokes allusions carries information from the past to the future. This information is revived in a communicative process of reading and interpreting. Though allusions present challenging literary experiences to the readers/interpreters, they also provide the enriching possibilities of conversation with the author, his artistic text and other texts, people or events to which literary wit alludes. Moreover, Lotman discerns some additional effects of an allusion by stating that it demands from the readers "an attitude of close friendship with the poet" therefore, each reader might be given a select position "of intimate friend of the author, one who possesses a special, unique, shared memory which enables him or her to explain the allusions" (ibid.). The scholar explains this in the following way:

> It is like a person joining a close group of friends who allude to circumstances he or she does not know about and who at first feels alienated and excluded from the group, but once he or she feels accepted as an equal the lack of direct experience is compensated for by indirect experience, and he or she is especially conscious of the trust being shown, and of *being included* in the circle of friends (ibid.).

Hence, the author can choose whom to include into his "circle of friends" and vice versa – whom to exclude from it and put in a position of "a stranger" since "a literary text can move the reader up or down the scale of this hierarchy in accordance with the author's intentions" (ibid.). For instance, consider how Jonson mentions his son in the title of the poem *On My First Son* (1616) but later inserts a covert allusion to his name in the text:

Farewell, thou child of my right hand, and joy;
My sin was too much hope of thee, lov'd boy. [175]

(lines 1-2)

The author devoted this poem to his son who passed away at the age of seven during a wave of plague in 1603 (Brock, Palacas 2016, 261). Lamenting for his loss, Jonson composed the poem in the same year, yet, it was published only in 1616. The poet incorporates a witty allusion to his son's first name calling him a "child of my right hand" (line 1) (Summers, Pebworth 1999, 170). Indeed, the name of his son was Benjamin, just like his father's, which in Hebrew means "son of the right hand"[176]. Understanding how and why the author constructed this allusion to depict his son's name brings the reader closer to the poet and helps to share to his sorrow. In order to decode such an allusion, the reader has to converse with his cultural memory, or rely on Biblical as well as foreign language and contextual knowledge which regards this particular author. However, there are many allusions which refer to the mythical characters or objects of faith.

For instance, Herbert's poem *Love III* (1633) bears witty allusions to God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Communion and the Last Supper. The poet presents an encounter of the speaker with Love and their dialogue. On the surface, it might seem to be a simple three-stanza depiction of a traveller who meets the allegorical figure of Love. However, multiple allusions hint to the reader that he needs to probe deeper in order to decode the complex meaning of literary wit. The first reading might suggest that Love could stand for a beloved woman or some love deity; however, during an interactive communication with the text it becomes clear that such a reading would not adhere to the overall effect of the poem. Therefore, the initial presupposition that the poem delves on amorous Love is rejected and communication proceeds to search for a new code. The reader has to look for other signs which would help him to construct a new code and decipher the poem's message.

The speaker feels "guilty of dust and sin"[177] (line 2) and is ashamed to look at Love and enter a place where Love dwells. He repents for his ill doings and material nature as, according to Lotman, earth, which stands in opposition to heaven, is frequently referred to as dust (977, 220). The poet incorporates

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[175] JONSON, B. *On My First Son*. Available at Luminarium Anthology of English Literature: http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/jonson/son.htm

[176] https://www.behindthename.com/name/benjamin

[177] HERBERT, G. *Love III*. Available at:
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44367/love-iii

the speaker and Love into a unique spatial model and hints that they belong to two absolutely different realms within it. In Second Two the speaker pleads:

> *I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,*
> *I cannot look on thee.*
> *Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,*
> *Who made the eyes but I?*[178]
>
> (lines 9-12)

It could be observed that the communication between Love and the speaker contains a witty repartee. When the latter regretfully asks how he can look Love into the eyes being so wicked, hence immoral and sinful and unappreciative, the former makes a sharp response: "who made the eyes but I?"[179] (line 12) kindly (*took [his] hand, and smiling did reply* (line 11) urging the speaker to face Love telling that his vision was granted for that precise reason. This repartee indicates that in his poem Herbert refers to God as Love; whereas the speaker is not a traveller but a soul. It has just ascended to Heaven which stands in opposition to the dust=earth parallel mentioned in the first stanza. The poet exposes Love's true identity only in the last stanza where the speaker makes a repartee to Love by the following address: "Truth Lord, but I have marred them"[180] (line 13).

The poet metaphorically models the speaker's spiritual seeing on the physical vision. Before it becomes clear that Love is God, it might seem that the speaker refers to sight as a physical ability to see; however, further deciphering the witty discourse the reader comes to another possible interpretation of sight, i.e. spiritual insight. In this light, eye could be regarded as "the primary organ of sense perception" and "a symbol of mental vision" or refer to spirit and stand as "mirror of the soul" and "an instrument of soulful-intellectual expression" (Becker 2000, 105). Similarly, in his book *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* Stuart Clark claims that "in religious terms, connections were often made between the eyes and the divinity (or Providence), between corporeal vision and spiritual enlightenment, and between seeing the visible world and understanding it as the work of an invisible and omnipotent God" (2007, 11). Thus, the vision is embodied in the poem from the poet's religious tradition to express the speaker's inner spiritual structure.

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[178] HERBERT, G. *Love III*. Available at Poetry Foundation:
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44367/love-iii
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid.

In Stanza Two God proclaims that He gave eyes to the speaker, i.e. a clear vision to discern good from evil; however, in the last stanza, the speaker admits that he has obscured his sight. The speaker's vision could become corrupted if the speaker allowed himself to see profane things. Moreover, unclear sight can poison the whole body as proclaimed in Matthew 6:22-23: "The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness"[181].

The speaker confesses that he does not feel to be worthy to dwell with the Lord and even begs to let him leave: "let my shame / Go where it doth deserve"[182] (lines 13-14). But God reminds him that His Son Jesus bore the blame for all the sinners. Therefore, he should not be afraid of to face God for He is Love (1 John 4:8) unconditional and revealing itself in the act of giving and sacrifice. As John 3:16 explains: "God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life"[183]. Therefore, God comforts the speaker and reminds him that he was redeemed by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The poem ends with Love's invitation to eat:

My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.[184]
　　　　(lines 16-18)

This particular extract alludes to Luke 12:37 where Christ warns His disciples to be ready for the Master's return: "Blessed will be those servants the master finds alert when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will get ready, have them recline at the table, then come and serve them"[185]. Another important passage to which Herbert alludes by mentioning the meat which is being served is from John 6:54. In it Jesus promises that "the one who eats my flesh

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[181] MATTHEW 6:22-23. Available at Biblegateway: https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+6%3A22-23&version=ISV
[182] HERBERT, G. *Love III*. Available at Poetry Foundation: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44367/love-iii
[183] JOHN 3:16. Available at BibleGateway: https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+3%3A16+&version=CSB
[184] HERBERT, G. *Love III*. Available at Poetry Foundation: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44367/love-iii
[185] LUKE 12:37. Available at: https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+12&version=CSB

and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day"[186]. Thus, though the speaker is God's servant, it is the Lord who serves him the meal and through his Son's flesh offered in the Holy Communion the speaker reconciles with God.

The wit of this poem which bears multiple Biblical allusions enables the author to communicate his remorse for sins and fear of not deserving God's love and mercy. Herbert's natural, simple, yet witty dialogue maintains the idea that salvation awaits for those who repent. Helen Wilcox highlights in the preface of the book *George Herbert: 100 Poems* that Herbert's poetry actively affects its readership and explains it in the following way:

> The main speaker frequently addresses God, though occasionally we hear the voice of the Lord in response, gently nudging the protesting human towards greater understanding. The speaker enters into debates with God, but also with parts of his own self – his wayward thoughts, his hard heart – and sometimes seems to recount stories for an audience. Above all, the voice of the speaker is so familiar in all its variety of moods and tones that we, the readers, can find our own experiences given expression in the poems, and we may in some sense become the speaker, too. Reading, and re-reading, Herbert's poem's is a process of self-discovery (2016, xi).

Indeed, reading and interpretation of such a poetic work as *Love III* intensifies the framework of the reader's mind since he reacts to the impulses which are imbedded in the text. These impulses are stored in human mind until they are reactivated in reading and interpreting a literary work which alludes to other text. Actually, allusions activate not one but two texts, since in order to decode their literary wit, the reader has to address his memory related to the two texts simultaneously. This memory operates through links with other texts and contexts which are stored in the reader's consciousness. In this respect, literary wit could be viewed as a means to store cultural memory which would not be confined in time and space but transferred during the act of artistic communication. Thus reading and interpreting literary wit is an active relationship of the reader with other cultural and social structures as well as other mentalities.

3.2.10. Sarcasm and hostility

It has been discussed before (see subchapter 1.2) that wit may express sceptical, critical and cynical opinion. To do that it employs **sarcasm** and **hostility** to deliver aggressive and sometimes even obscene utterances. Therefore, the wounding power of literary wit should not be underestimated.

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[186] John 6:54. Available at BibleGateway:
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+6:54&version=CSB

In his book *Talk Is Cheap: Sarcasm, Alienation, and the Evolution of Language* John Haiman points out that, contrary to irony which is sometimes unintended, sarcasm is "intentionally used by the speaker as a form of verbal aggression" (1998, 20). Attardo also emphasises that irony might be positive, while "sarcasm aims at hurting conversation partners; it is hostile and recklessly exposes others" (2014, 365). However, the interpretation of a sarcastic utterance is hindered by the fact that its producer's intent is always the opposite of his message's literal meaning. This allows the speaker to utter a positive message with a negative intent. Thus, literary wit expressed through sarcasm enables the speaker, in Haiman's terms, to alienate or detach himself from the social role that he is performing as well as from the content of his message (1998, 10). As a result, sarcasm requires the reader to recognise the negative emotional connotation of the uttered phrase with the help of literary context of a particular poem.

For instance, John Suckling's poem *The Wits* (1637) describes a trial or, as its second title specifies, *A Sessions of the Poets* lead by Apollo who aims to distinguish the best poet and award him a laurel wreath. By using Appolo's character Sucking joins the mythical and realistic projections and directs his criticism towards his contemporary poets sarcastically ridiculing their assumed fame which is so great that it requires god Apollo to act as a judge. The poem is structured in a way which enables the poet to mock each poet as he is asked to trial and being denied the award. Some poets could be recognised by their names, others are named by specific nicknames; therefore, contextual information is required in order to decode their identity, or to understand the aspects of criticism of a particular poet. For instance, it is not difficult to recognise that in these lines Suckling targets Benjamin Jonson. However, the wit of his sarcastic expression is context-bound and relies on the reader's knowledge of the socio-cultural landscape of the time. Consider the following excerpt (Suckling 1836, 87-91):

> *The first that broke silence was good old Ben,*
> *Prepar'd before with Canary wine,*
> *And he told them plainly he deserv'd the bays,*
> *For his were call'd works, where others were but plays.*
>
> <div align="center">(lines 19-22)</div>

Here, the poet alludes to the fact that Jonson has previously been nominated a poet laureate and received from King Charles a yearly pension of one hundred pounds as well as one terse of Canary Spanish wine (Whalley 1756, lviii-lx). This sarcastic comment might seem positive on the surface as the poet calls

Jonson "good old Ben", yet his message really aims to expose Jonson as a drunkard and an arrogant person. Within lines 21-22 the poet makes another sarcastic reference to the title which Jonson himself has given to his 1616 folio, i.e. *The Works of Benjamin Jonson*. Though it does not look exceptional for the contemporary readers, in the seventeenth century, calling a folio 'works' instead of 'plays' was considered uncommon and Jonson was criticised for being too arrogant in doing that. In fact, several epigrams were composed on this topic either attacking the author or defending him. In one of them, the author is demanded to explain why he calls his plays works; while in another epigram, the friend of the poet answers that Jonson's plays are works when the works of other poets are only plays (see Donaldson 2011, 327). Thus, it could be seen that Suckling relied heavily on his contemporary readers' literary and cultural knowledge in order they could comprehend his sarcasm and appreciate its witty delivery.

Hostile wit uses even sharper language to insult the person who is being attacked. In this excerpt from Marvell's *To His Coy Mistress* the speaker tries to affect emotionally the shy virgin and persuade her to consent to sexual intercourse:

> *Thy beauty shall no more be found;*
> *Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound*
> *My echoing song; then worms shall try*
> *That long-preserved virginity,*
> *And your quaint honour turn to dust,*
> *And into ashes all my lust.*[187]
> (lines 25-30)

The speaker warns his mistress that her time is running fast and she is getting older. Her physical beauty will fade and be worthless in a grave. The wit creates high intensity when the speaker presents his witty argumentation that this is her last chance to submit sexually before it happens without her consent, i.e. when worms devour her maidenhead after her death. Miller proposes alternatively that this wit allude so sexual intercourse:

> At other times a literature of seduction blames the woman for being too reticent or scrupulous about making her vagina available. The argument is the well-known gather ye rosebuds while ye may, which alternates flattery with the threat of horror and disgust that ultimately attends such scrupulosity. An honorable vagina (quaint Honour) eventually must admit a wormlike creature, like it or not (1997, 102).

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[187] MARVELL, A. *To His Coy Mistress*. Available at Poetry Foundation: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44688/to-his-coy-mistress

Worms eating female maidenhead after death has the implication of sexual act and physical passion. In this respect, worms acquire phallic association while act of devouring alludes to penetration. What makes this wit even more hostile is the pun on *quaint* which can mean 'proud' but at the same time point top female genitalia, i.e. cunt (since in Middle English it was sometimes spelled with q[188]). The wit of this passage is based on *The Order for the Burial of the Dead* depicted in the *Book of Common Prayer*: "we therefore commit his body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certain hope of resurrection" [189]. Here the spiritual and carnal projections are intermixed: after death human body is turned into dust since "all come from dust, and all return to dust"[190]. The wit of this sarcastic discourse also alludes to uncontrollable desire which is like fire within man burning everything to ashes. Hence, Marvell inventively plays with the sexual codes and their relation to male and female sexuality. His wit exposes the prevailing seventeenth-century cultural preoccupations with interrelated questions of sex, innocence and lust.

Sarcastic wit is also used to talk about wit itself. Thus, it can invoke metalanguage while criticising wit with witty language. In *A Satyr against Reason and Mankind* (1674) John Wilmont reasons about wits in the following way:

> *And wit was his vain, frivolous pretense*
> *Of pleasing others at his own expense.*
> *For wits are treated just like common whores:*
> *First they're enjoyed, and then kicked out of doors.*[191]

(lines 35-38)

Here the author delivers his negative attitude towards the writers who are considered to be witty. He suggests that wit is used to flatter and, therefore, cannot be regarded a serious discourse. Besides, he provides a harsh comparison of wits and whores by which he maintains that witty writers are like a prostitute who shares her body, hence in wits' case, the intellect with

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[188] ED. Available at:
http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=quaint

[189] Book of Common Prayer Online. Available at:
http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/CofE1928/CofE1928_Burial.htm

[190] Ecclesiastes 3:20. Available at:
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ecclesiastes+3%3A20&version=CSB

[191] WILMOT, J. *A Satyr against Reason and Mankind*. Available at:
https://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Texts/mankind.html#7

everyone. A whore is an adulterous woman who trades her sexual property as wits share the content of their mind with various men. The speaker exposes immoral and indecent behaviour of witty writers. Moreover, just like a whore uses her body to get some financial gain so do wits who apply their intellectual capacity in order to please the audience, receive money from their patrons or advance in making career. Raymond Stephanson asserts that "tropes of writer as whore can be found readily in Restoration court culture where the image could be understood as wanting to please one's patron, audience, or political master by writing the witty line" (2004, 118). However, the relationship of the client and a prostitute is never long lasting as, according to Wilmont, once sexual intercourse is over, she is "kicked out of doors". Hence, the career, fame and financial support of a witty writer can be cut short very quickly if another writer proves to be wittier than him.

The devices are means of witty-style creation as well as the foundation of the mechanism of creative thought. As such they belong to the secondary modelling system and are the basis of meaning formation in the semiotic system of the selected poems. The analysis of the selected seventeenth-century poetry revealed that literary wit is conveyed by additional devices than suggested by Manson, Long and Graesser. It could be stated that most frequently the mechanism for actualising literary wit involves a mixture of devices or devices within devices. This is evident in the cases where literary wit is conveyed by the device which is not self-sufficient and, therefore, invokes other devices to communicate the author's message to the reader.

It was observed that the complexity of the witty discourse structures is proportional to the intricacy of thought expressed by it. This means that the more laden literary wit is the more elaborate semiotic structure it requires. It also proves that as a mechanism of intellectual virtuosity literary wit should be approached with an open mind since it tends to transcend limitations that are imposed on it. The additional devices which were discovered while analysing the selected seventeenth-century poetry were: conceit (e.g. Crashaw's poem *On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord, The Weeper*; Donne's *Holy Sonnet XVIII*, *The Flea* etc.), paradox (e.g. Marvell *Eyes and Tears*; Crashaw's *On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord*) and grotesque (e.g. Crashaw's *The Weeper*; Donne's *The Flea*).

What is more, a tendency to evaluate wit using witty language was observed. Hence, the metalanguage of wit was employed to reflect on witty writers and provide critical opinion about them. The analysis also revealed some instances where literary wit is expressed not only verbally but by the graphic pattern of the poem. The decoding process of such poems becomes

even more complex since the reader has to recognize the pattern of the poem, decode its wit and only when interpret the overall meaning of the witty texture.

Literary wit is usually expressed through devices which present the astounding discovery of unsuspected resemblances between unlike phenomena. The substitution of semantic units by others is extensively applied in all seventeenth-century poetry but it should be stressed that the effect of literary wit is caused only when the correspondences are established between diverse and practically incompatible domains. This means that the comparison is based on the principle of bringing together the phenomena which would not be likened without the constructed witty situation within the poem. The most common devices which are used to construct literary wit based on comparison are metaphor, conceit and simile. This indicates the domination of thinking in analogues and reflects the very essence of creative consciousness of the seventeenth-century poets.

3.3. The changing projections of wit in the selected prose works

So far this dissertation examined literary wit within drama and poetry, meanwhile this subchapter presents its manifestation in the selected seventeenth-century prose. In terms of the semiotics of culture, a prose text is regarded not as a closed, self-governing, synchronic system of signs but as a message which is inseparable from its context and the collective memory which is stored in the inner structure of the message. In an attempt to reveal how the changing attitude to wit influenced its expression the two prose works from different periods have been selected for the analysis: John Lyly's *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* (1578) and John Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, and Severall Steps in my Sicknes* (1624).

Though Lyly's work was written in the late sixteenth century it was chosen for the analysis as together with its sequel *Euphues and His England* (1580) it brought literary wit into fashion. It inspired and influenced the witty writings of the Jacobean authors. Lyly's prose instigated a title for a specific literary style known as *euphuism* which is "an ornately florid, precious and mazy style of writing (often alliterative, antithetical and embellished with elaborate figures of speech)" (Cuddon 2013, 258). It marked a significant development in the English writers' awareness of the power of literary wit. Donne is acclaimed as the major seventeenth-century Metaphysical author with a distinct style of writing which is known for its witty conceits. His Metaphysical wit had profound impact on other seventeenth-century English

writers who attempted to follow his style. Therefore, it seems to be fitting to focus and explore the selected prose works of these two authors in the light of Lotman's semiotics of culture.

As seen above, in Subchapter 4.1 and Subchapter 4.2 the attention was given to the modes and devices of literary wit. Meanwhile in this subchapter the functions of wit will be brought into focus. As it has been discussed in Section 1.3.3, wit can serve the following functions: 1) it can be used to create and maintain an atmosphere of goodwill, understanding and common ground; 2) it can be applied to attack, defend or ridicule the interlocutor; 3) it may be evoked to highlight and important thought (Manson 1966, 15). This framework will be supported with the functions of text which have been proposed by Lotman. Thus, in this subchapter, a particular attention will be given to the expression of literary wit and its relationship with the given system of signs functioning within the seventeenth-century English literary community.

3.3.1. Anatomy of pregnant wit

Lyly's *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* (1578) set a standard and influenced the evolvement of literary wit in England. As its title indicates, the author aims to 'anatomise' wit, i.e. to disclose its virtues and vices. Hence, the first function of wit is to scrutinise itself. This means that within this prose work literary wit includes the elements of self-reflectivity. The metalingual structures appear in the authorial reflection on the witty language and its purpose. The book presents a peculiar case of the function of literary wit since it is applied to celebrate literary wit but at the same time it is also used to criticise it. The reason for this might reside in Lyly's intention for his books to be a moral exemplar which would inform his readership of the potential of wit as well as of its dangers. Thus, *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* is treated as a romance where witty text is deliberately structured to serve a didactic function and in the process showcase the intelligence of its creator.

It is important to note that the title of the work *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* is not accidental but deliberately constructed trying to keep up with the latest fashions of Lyly's time. In his book *The Body Embalzoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* Jonathan Sawday calls the early-modern society "the culture of dissection" (2006, 4). According to the scholar, "the period between the end of the fifteenth century and the end of the seventeenth century sees the birth of a 'new science' of the human body" (ibid.). He argues that "the early-modern period sees the emergence of a new image of the human interior, together with a new means of studying that

interior, which left its mark on all forms of cultural endeavour in the period" (ibid., 4-5). Sawday claims that "the plethora of works which appeared in England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries containing the word 'anatomy' in the title, testify to this sudden, and seemingly overwhelming, fascination. 'Anatomy': the very word was a modish phrase, a guarantee of a text's modernity" (ibid., 44). This means that Lyly used this particular term in the title strategically to position himself as a modern writer[192].

To reveal the creative capacity of literary wit as well as its unsuitable application Lyly divides his book into two parts. The first one tells the story of Euphues a young rake from Athens who exploits wit for his advantage and comes to Naples in search for new adventures, his friend Philautus and their fight over Lucilla, as well as wise Eubulus who attempts to educate Euphues about true virtues of wit and spare him the pain of learning from his mistakes. The second one centres on Euphues' awakening and realisation what wise wit is which is represented through letters written to his friends. Hence, the narrative structuring of the book becomes significant and could be summarised as Euphues' journey through literary wit which starts in his youth when he practises wilful wit and is finished when he gets mature by gaining wisdom, or wise wit. Naturally, literary wit is the thematic focus of this piece of prose and its main function is to lead the course of action.

Lyly includes his own views on wit in the lines uttered by his characters. His interest centres on the relation between wit and wisdom. He praises wit which is understood as the Classical *ingenium*, or "a sharp capacity of mind"[193] and despises such wit which is identified with wanton, fancy and secular curiosity. The first part of the book aims to represent wit (through Euphues) which is misused and educate how to discern between wit and wisdom (through Eubulus). It should be noted here that the names of the main characters are also significant: Euphues in Greek means elegant and witty, Eubulus could be translated as good counsel, and Philautus, with whom Euphues later develops friendship, means self-love (see Loughlin, Bell, Brace

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[192] Similar literary titles which include the same term during this period are: Thomas Rogers' *The Anatomy of the Minde* (1576); John Woolton's *A New Anatomie of Whole Man* (1576); Philip Stubbe's *The Anatomy of Abuses* (1583); Greene Arbasto's *The Anatomy of Fortune* (1584); Thomas Nashe's *The Anatomy of Absurditie* (1588); John More's *A Livelie Anatomie of Death* (1596); Thomas Bell's *The Anatomy of Popish Tyranny* (1603); Robert Prickett's *Times Anatomie* (1606); Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) etc.

[193] LYLY, J. (1578). *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. Available at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/cu31924013122084

2012, 459). Hence, the nominal category serves as an identifying mark which reveals each character's role. Lyly took the name of his main character Euphues from Roger Ascham's didactic book *The Scholemaster* (1570) where Euphues is described as a student who is "apt by goodness of wit, and applicable by readiness of will, to learning, having all other qualities of the mind and parts of the body, that must another day serve learning"[194]. Hence, Lyly did not aim to create new original characters, on the contrary, what is important for him is their conventionalism. In other words, the characters are meant to be typical rather than individualised because their roles are models of his artistic exemplary pattern.

Lyly's critique towards Euphues is evident at the outset:

This young gallant, of more wit than wrath, and yet of more wrath than wisdom, seeing himself inferior to none in pleasant conceits thought himself superior to all in honest conditions, insomuch that he deemed himself so apt to all things that he gave himself almost to nothing but practising of those things commonly which are incident to these sharp wits – fine phrases, smooth quipping, merry taunting, using – jesting without mean, and abusing mirth without measure.[195]

It can be observed that the author regards Euphues' wit as arrogant, lacking true wisdom and moral. What Lyly means is that Euphues does have talent for wit yet he uses it not to convey the truth but to take advantage by exploiting wit to profit or to showcase himself. Hence, he puts pleasure before truth and, as a result, his wit is used for the sake of wit but without any true purpose. In fact, in the first part of the book his wit performs two main functions: it is either employed as a social commodity, or as a source of his pride. Lyly invokes a rather balanced literary wit and alliteration ("inferior to none in pleasant **c**onceits" and "superior to all in honest **c**onditions") to criticise Euphues' practice of wit and discourse to reveal the extent of his arrogance.

The author bases his opinion regarding wit on the humanistic ideas whose central subject of debates was the relationship between pure eloquence and truth. Ascham explains the Humanistic principles in relation to wit in *The Scholemaster* where he discerns two types of wits, i.e. *quick wits* who are "more quick to enter speedily, than able to pierce far", and *hard wits* who are "painful without weariness, heedful without wavering, constant without new-fangleness"[196]. It could be observed that in the first part of the book Euphues

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[194] ASCHAM, R. (1570). *The Scholemaster*. Available at Project Gutenberg: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1844

[195] Ibid.

[196] ASCHAM, R. (1570). *The Scholemaster*. Available at Project Gutenberg: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1844

represents the quick wits. He has quick temper, high self-esteem and unwillingness to learn from more experienced wits even after fatherly Eubulus' warning: "Consider with thyself the great difference between staring and stark-blind, wit and wisdom, love and lust"[197]. Lyly stresses that wit can lead to folly if it is exercised only for its own indulgence, by establishing the following oppositions: blind vs sighted, wisdom vs wit, lust vs love the author invites his readers to discover the multiple interpretations and evaluations of literary wit. The principle of opposition is applied as an instrument of cognition which operates within binary logic. Hence, ignorance of wisdom is seen as the blindness of mind, and just as love is contrasted to lust, audacious wit might be regarded as lust of the intellect.

Nevertheless, Lyly maintains that wit can either "breed an intolerable trouble or bring an incomparable treasure"[198]. As Eubulus affirms by the following witty comparison, "the iron hot receiveth any form with the stroke of the hammer, and keepeth it being cold for ever, so the tender wit of a child, if with diligence it be instructed in youth, will with industry use those qualities in his age"[199]. Moreover, he claims that "a fine wit, a sharp sense, a quick understanding, is able to attain to more in a moment or a very little space than a dull and blockish head in a month"[200]. Thus, through his work Lyly communicates to his readers that learning is necessary in shaping a young wit and that wit itself is multivalent as it can be a powerful as well as dangerous power. Here wit serves the first of the aforementioned functions distinguished by Manson as the writer seeks to establish a common ground with his readers by delivering advice about the usage of wit, its dangers and merits.

From the perspective of semiotics of culture, Lyly's work is beneficial to be explored since it reflects the court culture of the period and could be treated as a model of courtly speech that was popular at that time. It is attested by the writer himself who stresses that this book "will recreate the mind of the courteous reader"[201]. The connection to the court is being brought up in the preface as well where Lyly claims that the work is composed "To the Gentlemen Readers"[202]. Every text contains its "readership image" which can be reconstructed by using a set of linguistic and cultural codes (Lotman 1990,

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[197] Ibid.
[198] LYLY, J. (1578). *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. Available at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/cu31924013122084
[199] LYLY, J. (1578). *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. Available at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/cu31924013122084
[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid.

64). Lily directs his prose work to a specific audience, i.e. the educated men of high social status, hence to the court. This is also evident in the style of *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* which is formal but at the same time Manneristic, i.e. based on excessively copious style of writing.

In her paper '*To Parley Euphuism': Fashioning English as a Linguistic Fad* Leah Guenther maintains that after the publication of *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*, euphuism became "not only a stylish but also a necessary part of Elizabethan courtier's verbal attire" and it functioned "as a fashionable garment and was 'worn' to garner social prestige" (2002, 24). As Lyly himself was a courtier keeping apace with the literary fashions and, in the case of euphuism, dictating literary trends himself. Besides, mastering the codes of courtly language was a social necessity for the seventeenth-century writers. In fact, Lyly uses literary wit to serve his own purpose too, namely, to incite paternalism of the wealthy patrons onto himself and advance socially. As listed in *The Epistle Dedicatory*, Lyly addresses his work to "THE RIGHT HONOURABLE MY VERY GOOD LORD AND MASTER. SIR WILLIAM WEST, KNIGHT, LORD DELAWARE"[203]. He uses wit as a tool to promote himself and to gain patronage. The author plainly explains his intention by stating that he is "committing this simple pamphlet to your Lordship's patronage and your honour to the Almighty's protection, for the preservation of the which, as most bounden, I will pray continually"[204]. Thus, the function of Lyly' text could be defined as its social role or its capacity to serve the demands of the author who creates the text. As noted by Lotman and Piatigorsky, "the function [of the text] is the mutual relationship among the system, its realization, and the addresser-addressee of the text" (1978, 74). Indeed, patronage was a common practice in Lyly's day. He even describes it in his book stating that individuals used their wit to profit from Euphues by "either soak his purse to reap commodity or soothe his person to win credit"[205]. But in order to stand high in a patron's favour and reap the social and courtly benefits one needs to gain their admiration first. To do that Lyly puts into use multiple literary techniques (alliteration, antithesis, balance, parallelism, repartees, repetitions rhetorical questions, rhyme etc.) and applies most of them simultaneously.

The author tends to quote the witty utterances which were worked out by other writers, therefore, his all book is extremely sententious. The analysed

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[203] LYLY, J. (1578). *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. Available at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/cu31924013122084
[204] Ibid.
[205] Ibid.

cases provide evidence that Lyly relies on the so called *learned wit* rather than constructing his own. Indeed, his novelistic text reflects the collective memory of other authors which is realised through intertextuality, i.e. other texts and contexts to which it frequently alludes. Such collective memory is activated during the process of artistic communication not only within the text itself but also in the consciousness of the readers who are attempting to decode it. Lyly is especially fond of using various moral maxims. The mechanism of his wit is largely based on the imitation of the Classical rhetoric and mythological exemplars. It means that wit is extracted from its original sources and is reintroduced in a new context. As a result, the semiotic modelling of the prose work is constructed on the basis of the iconic texts which were known to the educated sixteenth-century readers. The author does not confine himself to a merely sporadic employment of the ideas of the Classical authors or various proverbs, but rather compiles the multiple borrowed maxims together to manipulate these intertexts by transforming them in his own way in order to enhance and ensure the effectiveness of a particular argument he seeks to communicate. Consider how Eubulus attempts to convince Euphues that his parents did not impose good discipline over him in his youth:

> Did they not remember that which no man ought to forget, that the tender youth of a child is like the tempering of new wax apt to receive any form? He that will carry a bull with Milo must use to carry him a calf also, he that coveteth to have a straight tree must not bow him being a twig. The potter fashioneth his clay when it is soft, and the sparrow is taught to come when he is young[206].

The excerpt offers a whole cluster of sayings. The first one is created by the author himself. Eubulus compares a child to a soft wax which is easily malleable before it solidifies or matures. The next proverb, according to Morris Tilley's *Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1950) is borrowed from Quintilian or Erasmus[207], the former used it as an example of sententious maxims in the *Institutio Oratoria* published around 95 CE, the latter quoted it in his collection of Greek and Latin proverbs *Adagia* (1500). The maxim ("He that will carry a bull with Milo must use to carry him a calf also") refers to the idea that the one who tackles hard things should be able to deal with not so difficult matters first. To

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[206] LYLY, J. (1578). *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. Available at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/cu31924013122084

[207] TILLEY, M. P. (1950). *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. This dictionary has been very helpful in tracking the source of Lyly's literary wit. Its digitized version is available at: https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015016495585 was applied in the analysis of all further instances.

strengthen the effect of this quotation Lyly modifies it by introducing a Greek athlete and wrestler Milo of Croton who was famous for his exceptional strength in the sixth century BC (see Spivey 2012, 65–66).

The following proverb ("He that coveteth to have a straight tree must not bow him being a twig") is also transformed since originally it sounds as follows: "best to bend while it is a twig"[208], but Lyly reinterprets the proverb by stating that if someone wants to grow a straight tree, he should not bend it when it is young, perhaps pointing not so much to the lack of Euphues' early education, but that his parents' discipline exercised on him was wrong. The proverb regarding the clay ("The potter fashioneth his clay when it is soft") is created by Lyly, though he might have taken this idea from the proverb in Bible "God is a potter and we are the clay"[209] yet, Lyly's proverb is applied to remind Euphues that men must be disciplined in their childhood when they are most responsive to education, just like a soft clay is plastic and easy to be formed into various pottery objects. Also he claims that sparrows are being taught to return to their cage when they are young. This idea might have been inspired by a common practice to keep these birds as pets in Lyly's time. The speaker postulates that it is best to educate children early since that helps to prepare them for their future. Besides, at young age, people similarly to birds are most receptive to learning. As far as the function of wit is concerned, it could be observed that Eubulus mainly uses wit to highlight his opinion regarding parenting. The witty discourse is constructed of multiple maxims which strengthen his arguments presented to Euphues.

Though brevity is said to be the soul of wit and the most effective repartees are the ones whose response is immediate and direct, this is certainly not the case with Lyly. In fact, the focal point of *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* is not a consistent narrative but reccurent long speeches where the characters examine their own cunduct and ambitions. Though speeches are length, the insightful reader can discern witty repartees within them as Lyly's palate for wordiness takes over. Thus, the wit of Eubulus concerning new wax and soft clay receives a harsh witty repartee from Euphues. He retorts: "The similitude you rehearse of the wax argueth your waxing and melting brain"[210] thus taking the key concept from Eubulus' speech and twisting its meaning in a completely different direction. Euphues also claims that tiles and pottery produced from the same clay can be used "to keep out water" or "to contain

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208 LYLY, J. (1578). *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. Available at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/cu31924013122084
209 Ibid.
210 Ibid.

liquor"[211], thus stating that early education does not guarantee a moral behaviour in one's adulthood. In this instance, Euphues attempts to defend himself through wit, thus wit fulfils the second function. It should be stressed that repartees are applied by the author as they help to expose the difference between Eubulus' and Euphues' wit. The former wit is thought-through and applicable for a specific topic in the conversation with Euphues. Eubulus' wit is aimed to enlighten the speaker while delivering clear morals. Euphues, on the contrary, aims his wit to persuade Eubulus and defend his personal opinion which is opposite to the interlocutor's. Yet, he is not interested whether witty utterances are truthful. Thus, his wit is fabricated rather than premeditated to suit the demands of a particular situation.

Another example of the repartee which involves pun on words occurs when Philautus takes Euphues to his fiancé Lucilla. On their arrival, Philautus introduces his friend in the following way: "I was the bolder to bring my shadow with me (meaning Euphues), knowing that he should be the better welcome for my sake"[212]. In this statement the image of the shadow points to someone (in this case Euphues) who follows another person everywhere[213]. However, Philautus' mistress is far from pleased to see Euphues as she craves to spend time with Philautus alone. She shows her irritation by a witty repartee: "Sir, as I never when I saw you thought that you came without your shadow, so now I cannot a little marvel to see you so overshot in bringing a new shadow with you"[214]. As could be seen from Lucilla's repartee, she applies two meanings of the noun 'shadow' in her speech. Firstly, she uses the original meaning, i.e. "an area of darkness, caused by light being blocked by something"[215] to reproach Philautus and mock him. Then she invokes the meaning which was also applied by Philautus claiming that there was no need to bring another shadow, since he had always had his own with him. It can be seen that Lucilla aims her wit to ridicule Euphues which is the second function of wit.

Euphues, seeing that his friend is outmanoeuvred by Lucilla's wit, steps in and probes with his intellectual insight to the mistress's response by using it as a basis for his own repartee. He navigates his wit in the same direction that Lucilla has taken thus explaining to her: "the shade doth often shield your beauty from the parching sun, I hope you will the better esteem of the shadow;

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[211] LYLY, J. (1578). *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. Available at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/cu31924013122084

[212] Ibid.

[213] CDO. Available at: http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/shadow

[214] LYLY, J. (1578). *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. Available at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/cu31924013122084

[215] CDO. Available at: http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/shadow

and by so much the less it ought to be offensive by how much the less it is able to offend you, and by so much the more you ought to like it by how much the more you use to lie in it"[216]. Euphues clearly takes an upper hand with his witty repartee including in it a compliment on Lucilla's beauty, disclosing the benefits of the shadow (in its actual and figurative sense) and even delivering a covert sexual innuendo. Thus, here wit carries out the first function as Euphues attempts to establish a friendly atmosphere but at the same time it also serves the second function of wit as he also defends his friend Philautus and himself. While this repartee was constructed as the double entendre, other cases rely on proverbial knowledge which is presented through the colloquial language of the characters.

For instance, Euphues visits his mistress Lucilla whom he has not seen for some time and extends an apology for the lack of attention given to his beloved but gets a cold shoulder from her. During the time they had not seen each other Lucilla fell in love with Curio; therefore, she rejects her former lover: "Euphues, quoth she, you make a long harvest for a little corn and angle for the fish that is already caught"[217]. Lucilla's wit is constructed on the basis of two proverbs. The first one is taken from John Heywood (1497– 1580), an English writer known for his collection *Proverbs* (1538)[218]. It suggests that Euphues is overreacting to something which is not important anymore. The second one is created by the writer himself. By it Lyly expresses the idea that Lucilla belongs to someone else, i.e. Curio. Hence, this literary wit fulfils the second function as Lucilla ridicules her ex-lover.

Having heard about the change in Lucilla's heart, Euphues gives an extensive response in which he condemns her for lying to him, belittles Curio and wishes misfortune to a new couple:

> <…> my harvest shall cease seeing others have reaped my corn; as for angling for the fish that is already caught, that were but mere folly. But in my mind, if you be a fish, you are either an eel which as soon as one hath hold of her tail will slip out of his hand, or else a minnow which will be nibbling at every bait but never biting. But what fish soever you be, you have made both me and Philautus to swallow a gudgeon.[219]

[216] LYLY, J. (1578). *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. Available at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/cu31924013122084

[217] Ibid.

[218] TILLEY, M. P. (1950). *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Available at: https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015016495585

[219] LYLY, J. (1578). *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. Available at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/cu31924013122084

It could be seen that Euphues's repartee performs the second function of wit as he seeks to attack Lucilla and Currio. His retort consists of multiple proverbs. He constructs a repartee which he compares his love with a harvest which will end as soon as Curio "reap[s] his corn", i.e. has stolen Lucilla's heart from him. Regarding the motif of fish catching, Lyly compounds several ideas: firstly, Euphues claims that he could have never caught a fish, i.e. Lucilla, in the first place, since his infatuation was illusionary and Lucilla's affection was a mere pretence. The author quotes Heywood invoking his proverb about an eel.[220] It highlights the idea that Lucilla, just like an eel, is very hard to capture because it is slippery, meaning that she is untrustworthy and treacherous. He also compares Lucilla to another fish, a minnow. It is a small freshwater fish which, by Euphues' wit, suggests that Lucilla tends to flirt with multiple suitors though not taking real interest in any of them. What is more, Euphues compares himself and Philautus to fish as well, for the last proverb depicts them both swallowing the gudgeon, i.e. a small freshwater fish which is generally used as bait. Thus, through this wit, Lyly communicates to the reader that both Euphues and Philautus were deceived by Lucilla as they both 'swallowed her bait'. It should be stressed that earlier in the story Euphues warned Philautus: "take heed, my Philautus, that though thyself swallow not a Gudgen"[221] as if predicting what is about to happen, yet not foreseeing that his warning will perfectly fit himself.

As far as the modes of literary wit are concerned, Lyly invokes replies to rhetorical questions, answers to the serious statements and occasional quips. Euphues' wit is frequently expressed through an overstatement; he tends to base it on the principle of double entendres, but most often literary wit involves distortions of proverbs or sophistry of other authors to enhance his pseudological argument or support the premise which is being communicated. Another peculiarity of his wit pertains to its structure. According to Lotman, "the writer's thought is realized in a particular artistic structure and is inseparable from it" (1977, 10) which means that all the structural elements were purposefully intended by the author and are, therefore, meaningful. Thus, the reader needs to take this into consideration while communicating with the text serving as a message from its author. Lyly often relies on syntactical balance, antithesis and emphasises his structural parallels by alliteration.

[220] TILLEY, M. P. (1950). *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Available at: https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015016495585

[221] LYLY, J. (1578). *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. Available at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/cu31924013122084

Hence, his "symmetries and antitheses operate at every possible level – syntax, sound and sense – and Lyly manages to sustain this for virtually the whole text, not just for the set pieces (Pooley 2013, 26). For example, he states that Euphues's "hot **d**esire" for Lucilla very soon turned into "cold **d**evotion". It is obvious that the writer tends to maintain a similar length of his statements, support them with a clear antithesis and highlight them with alliteration. Lily's technique of interaction through wit involves unfolded proverbial wisdom which is elegantly arranged with skilful alliteration: "Ah Euphues, little dost thou know that if thy **w**ealth **w**aste thy **w**it **w**ill give but small **w**armth, and if thy **w**it incline to **w**ilfulness that thy **w**ealth **w**ill do thee no great good"[222]. As it was mentioned above, the author's ornate style is prone to combine various devices – antithesis, imagery, alliteration – for their cumulative potential in order to exert a larger impact on the reader. Consider the excerpt from Euphues' letter to Philautus where he condemns Curio:

> Though Curio be as hot as a toast, yet Euphues is as **c**old as a **c**lock; though he be a **c**ock of the game, yet Euphues is content to be **c**raven and **c**ry **c**reak; though Curio be old huddle and twang "Ipse, he," yet Euphues had rather shrink in the **w**etting than **w**aste in the **w**earing[223].

Lyly structures his discourse by the word-schemes which are based on vocal patterns providing to the reader an aesthetic rather than moral experience in reading. In this case, wit performs the second function, i.e. it is used to attack the opponent. The origin of the first proverb is attributed to John Skelton (1460–1529) who used it in *Image Hypocrisy*: *Works* (1520). By this proverb Euphues alleges that Curio might feel very comfortable in Lucilla's company, yet he himself claims to be calm about the situation or "as cold as a clock" – the saying created by Lyly[224] which is no longer in use since it was probably substituted by an idiom "as cool as a cucumber". The author uses the image of a clock ticking away steadily to deliver the idea that Euphues is indifferent to Lucilla's love life.

The following idiom ("cock of the game") is borrowed from the play *Misogonus* (1560) whose author is unknown[225]. Its origins come from the cock fights which used to be popular at the time. Euphues alleges that Curio is like a feisty combatant in a cockfight who showcases his superior powers. By

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[222] LYLY, J. (1578). *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. Available at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/cu31924013122084
[223] Ibid.
[224] TILLEY, M. P. (1950). *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Available at: https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015016495585
[225] Ibid.

comparing him with a game foul Lyly accentuates Curio's special qualities that he will further use to form an antithesis. He alludes to gamecocks being specially bred in order to increase their power and endurance which are necessary to win the game. Thus, Curio is portrayed as an aggressive opponent; whereas Euphues is satisfied to pronounce himself "to be craven"[226], i.e. a coward or as a cock that is not in a game, since he gives up the contest, in other words, surrenders.

The modern reader's engagement with Lyly's discourse of wit is complex since he not only created aphorisms and employed the wisdom of other authors, but also invoked the sixteenth-century slang. For instance, Euphues attacks Curio calling him an old huddle and twang which are obsolete terms "of contempt for a person"[227]. Here wit fulfils the second function as it is applied to insult the opponent. A huddle might refer to "old, decrepit persons, probably from having their clothes awkwardly *huddled* about them; or from being bent with age so that their figure appears all *huddle* and confusion" (Nares 1867, 240-241). However, in this context, 'huddle' might be also regarded as a verb which in slang means "to have intimate relation" (Williams 1994, 1444). Similarly, 'twag' carries a sexual connotation meaning "to coit with" (ibid.). Thus, Euphues stresses that Curio might enjoy Lucilla's company and boast that he is the man, i.e. ipse, while Euphues would rather "shrink in the wetting"[228] or withdraw from the game after hearing Lucilla's sudden rejection, than "waste in the wearing"[229], i.e. or discover that his mistress is in love with another man. It could be observed that Lyly relies on the combination of several alternatives to expose to the reader the witty bravura of Euphues.

Wit also tends to invoke the mode of rhetorical questions which are arranged in an uninterrupted succession. For instance, this is how Euphues ponders after falling in love with his best friend's fiancée:

> Is there anything in the world to be reputed (I will not say compared) to friendship? Can any treasure in this transitory pilgrimage be of more value than a friend—in whose bosom thou mayest sleep secure without fear, whom thou mayest make partner of all thy secrets without suspicion of fraud and partaker of all thy misfortune without mistrust of fleeting, who will account thy bale his bane, thy mishap his misery, the pricking of thy finger the piercing of his heart?

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[226] LYLY, J. (1578). *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. Available at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/cu31924013122084

[227] OED. Available at: http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/207928?rskey=M0Z8X2&result=3#eid

[228] LYLY, J. (1578). *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. Available at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/cu31924013122084

[229] Ibid.

But whither am I carried? Have I not also learned that one I should eat a bushel of salt with him whom he meaneth to make his friend? That trial maketh trust? That there is falsehood in fellowship? And what then? Doth not the sympathy of manners make the conjunction of minds? Is it not a byword, like will to like? Not so common as commendable it is to see young gentlemen choose them such friends with whom they may seem, being absent, to be present, being asunder, to be conversant, being dead, to be alive[230].

This passage could be treated as an example of how heavily overtaken by a variety of modes and devices of literary wit Lyly's prose can be. What makes it even more intricate is that they are all employed at once; as a result, the text generates manifold meanings and creates a highly challenging experience for the reader/interpreter. As far as the function of wit is concerned, it is applied to perform the third function of wit which means that Lyly uses it to cast light on the process of thought of his character. Rhetorical questions are also used to support an idea communicated by the speaker, or to contradict the previously expressed allegations of other speakers. For instance, Euphues alludes to several Classical philosophers as examples in order to rebut Eubulus' thought that the way Euphues was brought-up is a blemish to his birth:

But so many men so many minds; that may seem in your eye odious, which in an other's eye may be gracious. Aristippus a philosopher, yet who more courtly? Diogenes a philosopher, yet who more carterly? Who more popular than Plato, retaining always good company? Who more envious than Timon, denouncing all human society? Who so severe as the Stoics, which like stocks were moved with no melody? Who so secure as the Epicures, which wallowed in all kind of licentiousness?[231]

It should be noted that some of the rhetorical questions, as, for instance, the ones quoted above, are used as an actual evidence or basis for support; while other rhetorical questions surprisingly receive the answers, though they are frequently not given immediately. It is one of the peculiarities of Lyly's wit that its texture is scattered throughout the whole work and it is up to the reader/interpreter to follow the intricate manoeuvrings of his witty mind. The author is also fond of applying the same adage of wit for several times and in different contexts (e.g. the proverb "to swallow a gudgeon" which was analysed above is used on several occasions).

Moreover, Lyly's witty constructs embrace the balanced language with alliterative embellishments (e.g. "**s**leep **s**ecure", "**s**ecrets without **s**uspicion",

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230 LYLY, J. (1578). *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. Available at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/cu31924013122084
231 LYLY, J. (1578). *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. Available at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/cu31924013122084

"**m**isfortune without **m**istrust" etc.), proverbial wisdom such as "before you make a friend eat a bushel of salt with him" or "trial shall prove the trust" which date back to Cicero and Erasmus, as well as paradox (e.g. "being absent to be present", "being asunder, to be conversant", "being dead, to be alive"). In his prose Lyly even employs a poetic rhythm (e.g. "I will to Athens there to toss my books no more in Naples to live with fair looks"[232]). This means that Lyly constructs his wit by introducing into the structure of the prose text the organisational principles of poetry which are experienced by the reader as alien to the structural principles of prose but, for the same reasons, are regarded as a striking inclusion. This helps him to produce not only qualitative, but also quantitative effect of wit on the reader. Hence, it could be stated that the witty discourse of *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* includes within itself a polyphonic collision of different semiotic languages.

As it has been already mentioned, Lyly seeks to disclose the alternative possibilities of the development of the witty patterns and for that reason includes the two phases of Euphues's life – the one, when he boasts that no one can rival him in his wit (which is purposefully constructed by Lyly as artificial, overabundant and extravagant); and the other when Euphues changes his mind which is marked by the rhetorical question: "What greater infamy than to confer the sharp wit to the making of lewd sonnets, to the idolatrous worshipping of their ladies, to the vain delights of fancy, to all kinds of vice as it were against kind and course of nature?"[233]. It should be noted that the change of Euphues' personality is realised through the narratological shift of the plot-space and the degradation-rebirth scheme. Euphues regrets leaving Athens, "the nurse of wisdom", for Naples, "the nourisher of wantonness" and claims that he would have rather "eaten salt with philosophers in Greece than sugar with courtiers of Italy"[234]. This means that his move from Athens to Naples signifies his gradual moral degradation until his awakening and return to Athens: "I will to Athens there to toss my books, no more in Naples to live with fair looks"[235]. Hence, the change in a moral status is realised through a change in space, or a transfer from one city to another.

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[232] LYLY, J. (1578). *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. Available at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/cu31924013122084

[233] LYLY, J. (1578). *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. Available at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/cu31924013122084

[234] Ibid.

[235] Ibid.

City is introduced by Lyly as as symbolic space and acts as a domain of semiotic modelling. According to Lotman, "the city is founded as a challenge to Nature and struggles with it, with the result that the city is interpreted either as the victory of reason over the elements, or as a perversion of the natural order" (1990, 192). In this respect, Athens is the embodiment of reason and wit, whereas Naples represents destructive witlessness. Hence, the geographical and ethical spaces are reunited within a journey of Euphues, meanwhile his final destination signifies his improved morals. In Lotman's terms, Euphues is a *mobile character*[236] since he is able to cross the boundary of a particular plot-space which coincides with the change of his personality in the second part or the book (1990, 157). Accordingly, Eubulus could be regarded as his helper who attempts to encourage this change. Other characters (e.g. Lucilla, Philautus) act as *immobile* which means that they stay fixed at the particular points in the plot-space.

In contrast to the immobile characters, in the second part of the book Euphues proclaims: "philosophy, physic, divinity shall be my study"[237] which means that he is following Eubulus' counsel and turning to learning in order to cultivate his wit. Moreover, he promises "[to] endeavour [himself] to amend all that is past and to be a mirror of godliness hereafter"[238]. Thus, Euphues' wit is finally employed for the best possible service, i.e. religion. The trajectory of the progress of Euphues' wit could be rendered as follows: vanity→philosophy→medicine→theology. At the same, time Euphues gradually turns his wit into a contemplative one and is now extending his knowledge upon his friends as Eubulus has previously done to him.

It should be stressed here that Lyly's wit is grounded on the rhetorical eloquence and style which is evident from the multiple citations of the Classical philosophers, the usage of the phrases of balanced length, antithesis, alliteration and repetition. All the three functions of literary wit have been observed within the analysed work. What is more, it was noticed that in several cases literary wit performed two functions simultaneously. For instance, establishing a friendly atmosphere while aiming to defend oneself or another character. In addition, literary wit performs a didactic function as it is used to teach about the potential and danger of eloquent language. It is also

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[236] A *mobile character* in this case is a person who by degradation and rebirth frees himself from a certain convention, i.e. from wilful wit.

[237] LYLY, J. (1578). *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. Available at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/cu31924013122084

[238] LYLY, J. (1578). *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. Available at Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/cu31924013122084

self-referential since its functions within the prose work range from harsh criticism to high adoration. Prose gives an opportunity not only to compose literary wit but also to define and discuss the very phenomenon of wit. It provides ground to speak about wit in a witty manner. But most importantly, wit is used to demonstrate the conversion of the protagonist. It is a driving force of the plot since it is the main thematic element that structures and motivates the action.

Lyly created literary wit with a peculiar audience in mind. He dedicated his book to the privileged readers of the court and used his literary wit to educate but also to showcase his own authorial abilities. Leah Guenther explains it in the following way:

> Lyly's eye-catching style was a means of creating a unified authorial image for himself. More concerned with making a quick impression on the queen than building a respectable textual monument that would endure the passage of time, Lyly decides to offer up an article of linguistic fashion that will appeal to Elizabeth's fashionable flock. He decided to market a verbal garment to be bought and worn according to the fashions and trends of the day (2002, 29).

Hence, it could be stated that euphuism became a secret code language of the elite which was indicative of their superior social position. However, with the appearance of multiple publications[239] of *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* and its sequence *Euphues and His England* (1580), the euphuistic style had spread outside the court and soon became widely available including the lower classes. Guenther asserts that "once Euphuism was no longer the private toy of the court, once its excessive publication schedule made it available to a much broader audience, it began to lose its appeal and was ridiculed both on stage and on page" (2002, 34). This means that there is a constant renewal of codes within the semiosphere. While some parts of it were still enjoying the Euphuistic linguistic fad, other authors moved to the new literary trends.

After all, Lyly is mostly associated with a superficial ornate style, overworked verbosity and, therefore, is considered to be as a representative of the Mannerist style. Perhaps the writer himself predicted that it would happen since he admitted in *The Epistle Dedicatory* of his book that it is "a greater show of a pregnant wit than perfect wisdom in a thing of sufficient excellency to use superfluous eloquence"[240]. Therefore, it could be suggested that Lyly's wit worked against himself as it was "a hypertrophy of style" involving "a way of writing a sentence in virtually complete subjection to antithesis –

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[239] According to Guenther (2002, 24), after its publication in 1578, *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* was published in no less than fifteen editions by 1613.

[240] Ibid.

though the story itself is a warning against morally empty stylishness" (Pooley 2013, 25). Nevertheless, his manner of writing brought literary wit into vogue and affected the literary craft of the successive generations. That stressed, it is important to remember that one of the characteristic traits of literary wit is that it comes into fashion suddenly but just as fast falls out of it. Since the structural elements of the semiosphere are dynamic and continuously shifting, thus, the understanding, appreciation and application of literary wit has changed in the course of the seventeenth century. The euphuistic wit soon went out of fashion which confirms the ephemeral nature of literary wit since it is highly dependent on the current literary trends.

3.3.2. Vivisection of the metaphysical body

Another case of the seventeenth-century English literary wit is represented by the leader of the Metaphysical school of literature John Donne. His poetry has been discussed above (in the subchapter 4.2); while here the research focuses on his religious prose which relies on witty patterns. In his devotional verse, Donne uses literary wit to establish a contact with his readers as well as with God; whereas in his devotional prose the author applies wit to maintain and develop this relationship further. *Devotions*[241] is a spiritual work which is evident in the manner and content of literary wit. If Lyly's wit was largely based on deliberate imitation of the Classical rhetorical patterns and their piquant reworking by invoking an intriguing intertextual play, Donne's literary wit is designed to disregard, restructure or reverse the traditional habit of thought with intellectual liberty and penetrating sensibility. This can be illustrated by the analysis of the witty utterances of Donne's prose work *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, and Severall Steps in my Sicknes.* Yet, before proceeding, it is beneficial to provide some contextual information regarding the composition of this autiobiographical piece.

Devotions were composed in 1624 when the author was serving as Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. He entered the ministry in 1615 and was firstly appointed Reader in Divinity at Lincoln's Inn (Abrams et all. 2000, 1060). The beginning of his religious career was extremely promising: "Donne's metaphorical style, bold erudition, and dramatic wit at once established him as a great preacher in an age of great preachers" (ibid.). During this time, he delivered many sermons which he wrote down, 160 of them survived till this day. However, during the later years of his ministry

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[241] For the purpose of convenience the full title of Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, and Severall Steps in my Sicknes is shortened to Devotions.

Donne experienced a very poor health. Moreover, "given the presence of the plague that raged through London in 1625, sickness itself was hardly unusual" (Post 2006, 17). According to Jonathan F. S. Post, in December of 1632 the writer was "suddenly struck down by what is now called "relapsing fever"" (ibid.). This was a long and life-threatening illness regarded by Donne as a time when God visited and tested him. For him, sickness is "a means of preparing <…> body for its death and eventual rebirth" (Targoff 2008, 130). Therefore, during his disease he was constantly taking notes of his condition and "used the intervals of recovery and lucidity to pen" composing *Devotions* (Post 2006, 17).

In it Donne describes his own reality of being ill through a secondary modelling system which contains an individualised language of literary wit making the author's message to his readers intelligible. As noted by Lotman, any author "sees reality as a sign whose content consists of endless interpretations" (1977, 39). Hence, Donne turns to his own body to read and interpret the physical signs as a text to understand not only his own bodily condition but also the workings of God. This means that a human being lies in the centre of Donne's imaginative universe and is, therefore, an integral part of God's system of signs and His creative order. For Donne, God is the Maker and signifier of the material world; whereas human body is its "visible manifestation and sign in which all God's lines of meaning cross" (McDuffie 2005, ix). As God speaks to humanity in various ways, the writer perceives and depicts his illness as a sign from God which can be deciphered. In his opinion, disease, depicts the internal sinfulness of man. Therefore, it is possible to detect a binary opposition sick body vs healthy body which coincides with the Christian moral antinomy of sinfulness vs righteousness. Here illness opens up a new possibility to construct literary wit which would consider the relationship between body and soul, since the devotional author's physical body is suffering from a severe and sudden sickness (as is evident from the title of the book stressing "emergent occasions"), but his soul is also suffering from sinfulness. Hence, both fleshly and spiritual sickness is addressed.

In Donne's *Devotions* human body is treated not only as a fallen flesh. Using his own sick body as a primary example, the writer appeals to all humanity testifying that human wrongdoings and turning away from God have a destructive effect. The main function of his literary wit is to challenge his readers into communication with his text and through it with his body while deciphering illness as a sign from God. This means that those who are able to decode the signs from God correctly and repent for their sins will be forgiven.

Just like Lyly, Donne uses the pattern of fall and redemption, but in his work it develops through twenty-three stages called devotions – starting with the author falling sick, suffering from his illness and finishing with his recovery. Targoff claims that there is no precedent of such a work in English literature (2008, 130). He describes the structure of the *Devotions* in the following way:

> Part spiritual exercise, part medical journal, the text is divided into twenty-three "stations" charting the individual days of his illness. Each station, or Devotion, is further divided into a Meditation in which Donne ponders earthly topics and the condition of mankind; an Expostulation, in which he addresses the realm of the spirit, and directs at once desperate and challenging questions to God; and a Prayer in which he provisionally achieves some form of resolution. (ibid., 130-131)

It should be noted that the structure of the *Devotions* is symbolic since twenty-three devotions represent every day of the writer's sickness. Moreover, the division into three is also significant as it alludes to the Holy Trinity.

From the perspective of Lotman's semiotics of culture, Donne's *Devotions* might be regarded as an introspection into oneself or autocommunication in the "I-I" system since the writer was making notes during the period of his illness and then structured them into a set of artistic texts. Hence, it could be said that Donne puts his own body in a dialogical relationship with himself. Communication in such 'I-I' system qualitatively transforms the information and this leads to a restructuring of the actual 'I' itself (Lotman 1990, 22). Targoff asserts that "in transforming his sickbed musings into the rich, often baroque prose of the *Devotions,* [Donne] relives each phase of the illness" (2008, 131). It should be stressed that after the *Devotions* were printed, the private and intimate self-communication was exposed to the readers; therefore, the direction in the transmission of the message changed from the I-I system into the I-s/he system. In other words, the devotional texts started acting as codes which turned into the messages to be deciphered by the readers.

Wilcox asserts that, for Donne, any use of language with respect to God "constitutes a daunting linguistic challenge" (2006, 150). This is where literary wit comes forth. It differs from the earlier discussed cases of wit in its logical complexity and concentration on the Metaphysical matters. Contrary to Lyly, Donne does not attempt to imitate other writers but rather experiences his spiritual presence and communicates his inner sensations to the readers through an original and individual literary wit. The Metaphysical concern is present in the writer's relation to illness and is projected in the analysed prose work with exceptional erudition, ingenuity and devotion. The mechanism of Donne's wit tends to rely on elaborate conceits which reveal how wide his

Metaphysical space is where he finds his striking analogies, and how deep his sensation which arouses them is. If Lyly anatomised literary wit as a highly wrought literary bravura, Donne's focus is on a human body as a manifestation of God's presence. He is also fond of anatomy, yet he uses it to dissect a physical body rather than literary wit. He is not interested in the description of an external appearance, his assiduous attention is directed toward the body with its "organic mass, volume and articulation" (Carey 2011, 136). In other words, the Metaphysical author's imagination probes deep into the inner structures of the human body or, as Carey points out, "his impulse is towards vivisection" (ibid.). Donne presents self-reflective images of vivisection and as a self-anatomist fully absorbed into the innermost parts of his body records his sensations fusing them with his creative challenging intellect to generate literary wit as an intimate divulgence to the readers. Hence literary wit is used to comprehend a human body as a divine creation and a collection of signs of spiritual significance, as well as deliver persuasive arguments to the readers urging them to read their own bodies as sacred texts.

For instance, in *Devotion I* the writer depicts a human body as a microcosm: a "litle world" with "earthquakes in him selfe, sodaine shakings", "lightnings, sodaine flashes", "thunders, sodaine noises", "Eclypses, sodain offuscations, and darknings of <...> senses", "Blazing stars, sodaine fiery exhalations" and even "Rivers of blood, sodaine red waters"[242]. Hence, it mirrors the macrocosm or the world. It could be observed that literary wit which is expressed through the Metaphysical conceit helps to discover the correspondences between human sensation and the universe. The writer experiences the symptoms of disease as communicable signs within a complex geographic system: shivers as taken as earthquakes, fever as lightning, noises produced by the entrails as thunder, blackouts as eclipses, lucid intervals as starts and blood in the urine as rivers etc. In her paper *John Donne: Geography as Metaphor* Jeanne Shami enlightens that conventionally such a conceit is applied to represent "the harmony, completeness, and intricacy of the two worlds, and is intended to reinforce man's significance", however, Donne applies it "in order to show how man participates in the sickness and mutability of cosmos" (1987, 162). In other words, illness becomes a sign of disrupted order not only within human body but within the entire world. Targoff also maintains that "the microcosmic associations only intensify the anguish of the body; modest physical symptoms become ecological disasters

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[242] DONNE, J. (1624). *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, and Severall Steps in My Sicknes*. Available at Project Gutenberg:
http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/23772

in Donne's imaginative landscape" (2008, 139). The embodiment of sickness within the geographic spatial codes makes it better articulated to the reader and more communicable. At the same time, these witty conceits hyperbolically explicate each symptom of the state of the body in sickness. Therefore, the function of the writer's wit is to enhance his Metaphysical thought and this way make it more vivid and engaging for the reader in order to understand spiritual and moral matters.

Moreover, when Donne plays with conceits, he both shows his poetic inventiveness and probes into the nature of the world as a philosopher; therefore, his conceits "leap continually in a restless orbit from the personal to the cosmic and back again" (Abrams et al. 2000, 1059). While some analogies might capture the readers' attention by their invention, others, as, for example, "rivers of blood" astound by the gruesome imagery. But such a vivid wit is applied purposefully since his prose work involves both his spiritual meditation and acts as a homily to others. Hence, to some extent the speaker also acts as a preacher. Naturally, in his devotional writings the main function of literary wit is to call attention to the religious truths which it communicates to the readers.

Donne spent long days within the narrow space of his bedroom suffering from fever, yet even in such serious conditions he was able to find inspiration in his inner sensations and surroundings. For instance, he compares his sickbed to a prison and even a grave in *Devotion III*: "A sicke bed, is a grave; and all that the patient saies there, is but a varying of his owne Epitaph"[243]. The author suggests that, while being ill, a patient is unwillingly entombed in a sick-bed where he becomes deeply conscious of the approaching death and the present state which is experienced as an act of composing his own epitaph. At the same time, the entombment reminds the readers of another state when an embryo is in mother's womb thus connecting birth with death. Hence, it could be claimed that in Donne's creative vision a grave becomes a womb of the earth before the rebirth and Resurrection of a man.

Another witty mechanism used to construct devotional wit is paradox applied to reveal the patient's spiritual as well as physical state: "Miserable and, (though common to all) inhuman posture, where I must practise my lying in the grave, by lying still, and not practise my Resurrection, by rising any more"[244]. The author develops a spatial system in which the movement up on

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[243] DONNE, J. (1624). *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, and Severall Steps in my Sicknes*. Available at Project Gutenberg: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/23772

[244] Ibid.

the vertical axis corresponds to the Resurrection. Thus, the language of physical disease is applied to describe the spiritual state.

In *Devotion II* the speaker laments: "My body falls downe without pushing, my Soule does not go up without pulling: Ascension is my Soules pace and measure, but precipitation my bodies"[245]. The model of the geographic space is invoked again. Here upward and downward directions acquire religious connotations. The author uses the downward movement to expose the fall of a man and his will and stresses that the upward movement or spiritual uplifting is needed in order to be restored. According to Lotman, "movement in geographical space meant moving in the vertical scale of religious and moral values, the top of the scale being heaven, and the bottom hell" (1990, 171). Thus, for Donne, all matters of sin are evident in a sick human body and make a part of an ongoing narrative of Salvation whose trajectory could be represented by the following sequence: Creation→Fall→Redemption→Resurrection. This, though just in part, mirrors the eschatological cycle described by Lotman as a common schematic narrative of a single person: "the hero in existence (as a rule the narrative does not begin with his birth), his ageing, decline) sin of incorrect behaviour), or congenital defect (the hero is misshapen, a fool, sick) then death, rebirth and a new, now ideal, existence (which ends as a rule not with his death but with his apotheosis)" (1990, 168). Donne structures his own eschatological fate by depicting his experience of sickness and imagining his own death, putrefaction of his physical body and eventual rebirth or Resurrection. Although he experiences physical suffering he never complains about it accepting his illness as a preparation of the physical body for its death which brings him closer to reunion with God.

Donne often describes his feelings and spiritual experience in meticulous anatomical detail. His literary wit embraces both the physiological and spiritual dimensions which become the primary matter of the Metaphysical enquiry. In *Devotion V*, he declares that a sickbed is even worse than a grave since being in either a bed or a grave a man feels lonesome but, as the writer claims, "in my bed, my soule is still in an infectious body, and shall not in my grave bee so"[246]. Thus, the reader is faced with a shocking shift of thought as he discovers that such a horrid locus as a grave is a preferred prospect for the sufferer. According to Donne, infection crosses the boundaries and spreads not only through the body but also the soul since sickness is a physical sign of

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[245] DONNE, J. (1624). *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, and Severall Steps in my Sicknes*. Available at Project Gutenberg: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/23772

[246] Ibid.

sinfulness. In other words, they are analogous: infection (the body) = sin (the soul). In sickness the possibility of temptation remains since the body is still alive and may affect the soul; while in grave the body is dead leaving no possibility of such contamination of sin. As noted by Smith, Donne's "bodily sickness does not simply stand for or represent his soul's sickness but is one with it" (2006, 143). Therefore, *Devotions* clearly demonstrate "the close congruence of body and soul, a correspondence of the physical and spiritual states" (ibid.). In this context, literary wit offers the author's perspective which is logically supported – he is looking forward to his Resurrection since only then he will escape the infection of sin. As a result, a grave is considered to be an important place where the beginning of the desired transformation of the resurrected body takes place.

Through an artistic communication with his readers Donne seeks to appeal to their assumptions and, to put it in Barthes wording, discomfort or even unsettle the prevailing attitude towards death and alter it. The writer encourages to look forward to death instead of fearing it, for death is an integral part of the process leading to Resurrection. In a 1624 sermon on the conversion of St. Paul, he claims that God "brings us to death, that by that gate he might lead us into life everlasting" (2012, 305). However, as Parfitt asserts, "the physical facts of decay are intimidating in their destruction of our bodily reality" which signifies the end to non-believers; while Christians do not have to accept this as the end but rather "believe in the resurrection, the Last Judgment and an eternity of bliss or torment" (1989, 122). Nevertheless, the scholar claims that "the challenge lies in fully trusting that there is survival of physical decay. The failure of trust is conducive of despair" (ibid.). As a communicative process, the deciphering of Donne's literary wit promotes introspection and accommodates the reorganisation of the reader's personality or at least a revision and partial transformation of his self-awareness about death. The reader is shocked to experience illness together with its sufferer, decode it as a message from God which urges to beg for forgiveness in order to attain everlasting salvation. Thus, it could be claimed that deciphering of Donne's Metaphysical wit operates as a religious experience which stimulates spiritual awakening.

The semiotic structure of the writer's wit gets more complex as his disease spreads throughout the structure of a human body. In *Devotion IV* Donne becomes convinced that the architecture of a human body is far more intricate in comparison to that of the world:

> Man consistes of more pieces, more parts, than the world; than the world doeth, nay than the world is. And if those pieces were extended, and stretched out in

Man, as they in the world, Man would bee the Gyant, and the Worlde the *Dwarfe*, the World but the *Map*, and the Man the *World*. If all the *Veines* in our bodies, were extended to *Rivers*, and all the *Sinewes*, to *Vaines* of *Mines*, and all the *Muscles*, that lye upon one another, to *Hilles*, and all the *Bones* to *Quarries* of stones, and all the other pieces, to the proportion of those which correspond to them in the world, *Aire* would be too litle for this *Orbe* of Man to move in, the firmament would bee but enough for this *Starre*.[247]

It could be seen that in his witty discourse Donne not only dissects but also extends the structural organisation of a human body. His Metaphysical conceit gets more intriguing when he compares human organs (veins, sinews, muscles, bones) to the objects of the geographical landscape (rivers, mines, hills, quarries of stones) and even transcends human construction to the cosmic realm (the orb, the firmament, the star). Such intellectual and grotesque wit elevates a man to the firmament and portrays him as a giant. Carey describes Donne's technique in the following way:

> The human body expands beneath Donne's exploring eye, becoming more intricate and manifold. His prose acts like the screwing down of a microscope into focus: familiar bits of body acquire alarming geographical dimensions. By the time he has finished, his gigantic humanoid is craning its neck among the planets. But the effect is not simply one of extension. The bones and stones and rivers and mines and veins and sinews interfuse, so that a more solid creature emerges, complete with humps and pits and cavities (2011, 145).

It could be observed that earlier Donne applied the notion of a man as a little world, or microcosm which is analogous to the large world, or the macrocosm; whereas here he paradoxically reverses them by stating that man is, in fact, a macrocosm, or a giant in comparison to the world. Literary wit enables him to explore human anatomy in order to disclose to the reader how manifold and elaborate man's structure is. Carey explains Donne's writing in the following way:

> When he speaks of the 'muscles that lie upon one another', for instance, the wording takes us in through the folded layers of muscle, and lets us feel their depth. Paradoxically the body in the passage impinges on us with greater force because it is likened, throughout, to dead things. We register its separate existence the more definitely, as when we handle a temporarily numbed part of ourselves (ibid.).

The writer develops his conceits by comparing the animate to the inanimate systems (e.g. human veins=rivers, muscles=hills etc.). This technique enriches the artistic communication of the author with his readers; moreover, the

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[247] DONNE, J. (1624). *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, and Severall Steps in my Sicknes*. Available at Project Gutenberg: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/23772

readers can imagine, interpret and understand their inner self better. According to Donne, men generate thoughts and thoughts, in their turn, are their creatures. In a similar way, if men are portrayed as giants, their thoughts are also gigantic which "reach from *East* to *West*, from *Earth* to *Heaven*, that doe not onely bestride all the *Sea*, and *Land*, but span the *Sunn* and *Firmament* at once"[248]. It seems that Donne's artistic vista embraces all just like his own "thoughts reach all, comprehend all"[249].

The author also applies personification to construct his wit: in *Devotion VII* he observes that "*Diseases* themselves hold *Consultations*, and conspire how they may multiply, and joyn with one another, and exalt one anothers force"[250]. In the *Devotion X* he describes his illness as a case in court where his own body serves as reluctant jury: "The pulse, the urine, the sweat, all have sworn to say nothing, to give no Indication, of any dangerous sicknesse"[251]. Thus, literary wit reveals that not one but several diseases corrupted the sick body; moreover, the physical body is working against man as it is itself a victim and a producer of all the diseases. Consider how Donne contemplates on that in *Devotion IV*:

> And then as the other world produces *Serpents*, and *Vipers*, malignant, and venimous creatures, and *Wormes*, and *Caterpillars*, that endeavour to devoure that world which produces them, and *Monsters* compiled and complicated of divers parents, and kinds, so this world, our selves, produces all these in us, in producing *diseases*, and *sicknesses*, of all those sort; venimous, and infectious diseases, feeding and consuming diseases, and manifold and entangled diseases, made up of many several ones. And can the other world name so many *venimous*, so many consuming, so many monstrous creatures, as we can diseases, of all these kindes? O miserable abundance, O beggarly riches![252]

Once again the writer invokes the analogy between the human body and the world to disclose the former's self-destructive nature. Here diseases and sicknesses are compared to snakes (serpents, vipers) and vermin (worms and caterpillars). He explains that just as the world produces these poisonous and deadly vermin, so does the body engender malignant and contagious illnesses. Donne is convinced that death is born in man since he eats what causes him to be sick; moreover, his physical body becomes food for the diseases, thus he is nourishing them.

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[248] DONNE, J. (1624). *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, and Severall Steps in my Sicknes*. Available at Project Gutenberg:
http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/23772
[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Ibid.

The writer informs that there are so many dangerous creatures in the world and so many diseases within a human body that it is nearly impossible to name them all. Calling such a state "miserable abundance" and "beggarly riches", Donne works out his wit on the basis of an oxymoron. The author expresses the paradoxical state where man's physical body acts against himself. Therefore, he rhetorically asks: "whats become of mans great extent and proportion, when himselfe shrinkes himselfe, and consumes himselfe to a handful of dust?"[253].

Donne introspectively examines not only his anatomical but also his emotional state. He wittily depicts an intense suffering which a patient has to endure while being sick. He envisions a man as a land which is surrounded by the sea of despair: "misery, as the *sea*, swells above all the hilles, and reaches to the remotest parts of this *earth*, *Man*"[254]. The writer penetrates into the deepest bodily organs with his intellectualised emotion and wit to convey to the readers that being sick and suffering in pain are equal to being engulfed by an uncontrollable natural force. However, he paradoxically also points out that sickness is a blessing from God, since it is through sickness that God is able to communicate with man and show via its symptoms the defects of a sinful soul that are otherwise invisible.

Nevertheless, the writer urges the readers not to fear death and separation with the physical body which is presented by the building conceit. He puts forth the idea that soul lives in a human body as its house. However, when a man dies, his soul ascends to Heaven; hence a human body is no longer "a dwelling house, because none dwells in it"[255]. Moreover, it will soon lose its title of the body too as it will go through the process of putrefaction. But Donne finds aesthetic inspiration even in the morbid act of flesh rotting. He observes a human corpse going through the stages of decomposition as a dynamic process. Hence, even after death the body undergoes many transformations. In the *Devotion XVIII* Donne incorporates gruesome images of the dissolution of the physical body to reveal the consequences of sins: firstly, the body is seen as "a statue of *clay*"; then it is compared to snow, to "a *handful* of *sand*", after that to "dust" and, finally, to "a pecke of *rubbidge*,

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[253] DONNE, J. (1624). *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, and Severall Steps in my Sicknes*. Available at Project Gutenberg: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/23772

[254] DONNE, J. (1624). *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, and Severall Steps in my Sicknes*. Available at Project Gutenberg: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/23772

[255] Ibid.

so much bone"[256]. Blaine Greteman explains that "each of these changing material states represents another kind of death, and by implication another stage of life, for a dynamic body that stays in morbid motion long after the soul has flittered away" (2010, 35).

Thus, Donne views death as a dynamic process, the movement demonstrating the following trajectory: clay→snow→sand→dust→rubish. Firstly, he imagines the dead body as a statue made of clay since it becomes stiff after death. At the same time the image of clay alludes to the creation of Biblical Adam (see Genesis 1–8). Only in this case, it is not the creation but rather destruction of a human body, or a backward movement. In the second phase, the body is viewed as snow since it becomes cold and pale. Moreover, in this phase, the limbs melt off from the body, thus, an active decay begins when fluids are released through orifices and, as a result, human organs, muscles and skin become liquefied. At this phase, the body's soft tissue decomposes which symbolically resembles the melting snow. Other images point to the phase of skeletonisation when the remaining parts of a corpse dry out and disintegrate into "a handful of sand" which dissolves like dust. Here, the author invokes the religious context as his wit alludes to the passage from *The Book of Common Prayer* devoted to burial where, after death, a human body is said to be given back to the earth: "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certain hope of resurrection"[257]. Hence, a human body that was previously described by Donne as the giant after death becomes as small as a grain of dust. Finally, Donne views human carcass as rubbish by which he means that it is worthless since only the spiritual body remains solid; whereas the physical body dissolves into nothingness. Therefore, in his witty discourse death is rendered not as an end of man but as his new beginning, an entrance into an eternal life. Using meditative wit for the edifying purposes the writer brings the readers of his *Devotions* to the creation of the world and man. The witty discourse reminds them that they were made of dust and will turn back into it again and only then resurrect. Donne reasons about that in *Devotion XVII*:

> All *mankinde* is of one *Author*, and is one *volume;* when one Man dies, one *Chapter* is not *torne* out of the *booke*, but *translated* into a better *language;* and every *Chapter* must be so *translated; God* employes several *translators;* some peeces are translated by *age*, some by *sicknesse*, some by warre, some by *justice;* but *Gods* hand is in every *translation;* and his hand shall binde up

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[256] Ibid.
[257] *The Book of Common Prayer* Online. Available at:
http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/CofE1928/CofE1928_Burial.htm

all our scattered leaves againe againe, for that *Librarie* where every *booke* shall lie open to one another...[258]

Here he presents an elaborate conceit where death is seen as a translation. Just like the bodily parts constitute a structure of a human organism, humanity consists of individual people who are interconnected and form a book, or one volume. It is written by one author, in the same way that all men are created by God. Hence, a man is regarded as a sacred text that is composed by God as its author. Each individual represents a chapter in the book. According to Donne, after death every chapter is not torn out of the volume or humanity, but translated. Hence, death is experienced by a man not as total destruction but as a transition or translation to "a better language", i.e. transition from the physical to the spiritual state which is performed by several "translators" (old age, disease, war or law) with a supervision of chief editor God.

Donne believes that God will gather all men or rebind all leaves into the volume of humanity. Moreover, according to Donne, every book will be open to another in the eternal Library or Heaven. Which means that in heaven all individuals will be honest to one another since they will not have sins, thus there will not be anything to hide. It could be seen that the imagery in Donne's devotional text is constantly changing: firstly, the mankind is viewed as one volume and a man is considered to be one chapter in it, then men are portrayed as leaves of the book and, finally, every individual represents a book in the library of heaven. Thus, the reader must be very attentive and follow writer's twists of mind in order to comprehend his message. Indeed, the dynamism of imagery could be considered as an integral part of the Metaphysical wit.

As the speaker spends all his time in the sickbed his wit is induced by the sensations of his physical body or the surroundings of his bed-chamber. On one occasion he hears the church bell tolling for somebody who passed away. This sound immediately provokes the meditation upon death which is regarded as diminishment of the whole humanity. Donne expresses this by a complex interplay of cartographic images:

No man is an *Iland*, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the *Continent*, a part of the *maine*; if a Clod bee washed away by the *Sea*, *Europe* is the lesse, as well as if a *Promontorie* were, as well as if a *Mannor* of thy *friends* or of *thine owne* were; any mans *death* diminishes *me*, because I am involved in

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[258] DONNE, J. (1624). *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, and Severall Steps in my Sicknes*. Available at Project Gutenberg: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/23772

Mankinde; And therefore never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for *thee*.[259]

Here humanity is regarded as a continent, i.e. Europe and each man as a piece of it. Therefore, according to the author, each death represents a subtraction from the entirety of the continent. Death is portrayed as washing away of some part of the mainland by the sea or ocean. The humankind is viewed as one volume or "a collective body"; therefore, a death of one person is felt "as an unnatural severing of a constitutive part" (Targoff 2008, 148). The writer feels this separation himself and states that every single death decreases him just as Europe or humanity. Donne's wit attests a full integration of an individual with humanity. He feels the death of one man as a personal loss; therefore, he invites the reader to consider the toll of the church bell not as a sign of somebody's death, but rather "for a signal of the actual death of a part of himself" (Smith 2006, 145). The writer addresses the reader directly and reminds him that he will also die since the bell that tolls for someone else also tolls for the reader. Therefore, Donne urges him to feel himself as an important constitutive part of humanity and experience each death as his own loss.

The Metaphysical wit engages the reader who becomes a participant witnessing the speaker's phases of disease and sensing what the patient feels and recovering together with him. In the letter to his friend Sir Robert Ker Donne explains that his decision to publish *Devotions* was induced by the wish "to minister some holy delight" (Gosse 2019, 189). Such "holy delight" could be felt by the author of *Devotions* reading his text after recovery and reliving the sickness as a reminder that it is quite easy to relapse again just as to go back to a sinful way of life. In the same way, the reader while deciphering Donne's cryptic witty puzzles feels the delight "of being invited into the mind of someone who thrives on the sensitivity that illness effects in body and soul, someone who welcomes, rather than shuns, the opportunity to rehearse for his death" (Targoff 2008, 153). Hence, it could be observed that Donne's engagement with his own sick body provides a fruitful ground for his Metaphysical wit that is saturated with anatomical and physiological details which are explored in religious terms. This makes Donne's Metaphysical wit stand out as an exceptionally original creative flourish which is very different from the wit of Lily. The writer invokes an inventive density of imagery as an emphatic gesture the function of which is to direct the readers' attention to the

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[259] DONNE, J. (1624). *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, and Severall Steps in my Sicknes*. Available at Project Gutenberg: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/23772

focal points of his witty discourse and though labyrinthine movement enhance their decoding experience. The complex texture of *Devotions* reveals the author's deep self-reflecting scrutiny within the frame of literary wit that is very different from any other witty discourse of the seventeenth century. Smith rationalises about it in the following way:

> Wit is central to the endeavour. In these *Devotions* wit is the indispensable means of holding together the physical event and the spiritual condition, the pattern of the illness and the providential consequence. This mode of wit is distinguished from other forms of wit which were current in seventeenth-century Europe in that it does not aim at figurative enlivenment. It sets itself to apprehend metaphysical issues, as it were sensibly and immediately in the contingent occurrences of the world. The wit of Donne's *Devotions* makes a providential drama of the processes of nature themselves (2006, 151).

It is worth stressing that the application of Lotman's approach of the semiotics of culture allowed to capture the complexity and operation of literary wit. The driving force of *Devotions* is the author's wish to understand his disease and to gain some control over it. Hence, the main function of literary wit is to allow the writer grasp and analyse his condition, and then to describe it to the readers. He searches for the meaning and signification in his illness and seeks to discover and declare to his readers that God is present in our life and during our sickness. It could be said that Donne experiences his illness as a specific semiotic space into which he is enfolded and which needs to be communicated as a witty devotional message addressed to his readers.

The writer's Metaphysical wit requires a constant interaction with the readers' mentality in order to be activated. The *Devotions* accumulate information which was recorded by Donne as an intimate memory that is transferred from the seventeenth century to the modern readers of today. Through wit the author is able to portray the power of his mind to observe, to see likeness in seemingly unrelated things, mix various categories and this way cast light to the subjects of spirituality and mortality. As a result, wit becomes not only an effective technique but a mark of the quality of Donne's linguistic grace and his mental agility.

The multi-systemicity which is used in the construction of the Metaphysical wit results in the thick information content of the artistic devotional prose which contributes to knowledge and reformulation of the reader's knowledge. While deciphering it, the readers get involved in an artistic communication with Donne, his devotional text and its specific context. This act of communication also involves the readers' interaction with themselves which is realised through, in Lotman's terms, "self-tutoring" that is needed to reconstruct the meaning of a witty discourse (1990, 16). The

scholar claims that "even in complex cases the receiver first finds out some indications as to which of the codes he knows the message is encoded in, and then proceeds to the 'reading'" (ibid., 15). Hence, Donne's *Devotions* stores and transports the coded information from the seventeenth century which is retrieved by the readers who decode it. Moreover, while interpreting his witty texts, they supplement the gathered information with their own; thus they not only activate the Metaphysical wit but also supplement it with their contemporary mindset.

Hence, a conclusion can be drawn that wit rests on the inventiveness of the author but at the same time it also relies on the perceptive skills of the readers to decode and actualise it. Most importantly, as was stressed by Lotman, "for an intelligence to function there must be another intelligence" since "intelligence is always an interlocutor" (1990, 2). This provides hope that there will always be intelligence which will not be discouraged by the differences between the seventeenth-century and the contemporary codes and engage into an interactive act of interpretation of witty discourse which provides aesthetic and intellectual gratification as well as spiritual edification.

CONCLUSIONS

Stemming from an exceptional intellect and unique sensibility, literary wit epitomises the seventeenth-century English writers' literary as well as cultural reality by stimulating elegant aesthetic and cultivated eloquence. The core of their witty discourse resides in the fact that its constructors invested their creative energies in setting up artistic communication with the readers acting both as receivers and creators of literary wit. Therefore, the instances of literary wit should not be treated as mere decorative elements but rather as an embodiment of intentional artistic messages within the English seventeenth-century system of literary works.

The study has revealed that literary wit in the selected seventeenth-century English drama, poetry and prose is employed as deliberate, intellectual artistic expression that is mostly serious and rational rather than humorous in its nature (especially in the analysed devotional poetry and prose). It tends to generate intellectually charged messages, occasionally in combination with a touch of humour that may be sharp and taunting (especially in the Cavalier poetry explored and the selected dramas).

It should be noted that intricate witty patterns were identified in various dramatic (comedy, tragedy, dramatic parody and satirical play) and prose (didactic and metaphysical) genres as well as in secular and devotional poetry. However, although literary wit is not attached to any particular type of literature and can be equally projected in drama, verse and prose, it is used there for different purposes that determine the construction and quality of wit. In drama, literary wit relies on an interactive system involving multiple characters who might refute each other's arguments, build their repartee on them, praise and flirt, or attack and even humiliate an opponent in a verbal duel. In this respect Lyly's prose work *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* shares some features common to drama since it invokes a similar exposition of witty expressions. Nonetheless, the writer also intertwines poetic patterns, as his refined aesthetic presentation is dedicated to displaying his learning and exceptional writing skills. Whereas Donne's devotional work *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* is more contemplative and closer to his pieces of poetry, which is natural as he is himself also a poet. Therefore, his conceited Metaphysical wit presents a set of structured spiritual and intellectual exercises designed to lead the reader to a deeper understanding of religious truths and through them come closer to God.

Though all the selected texts could be considered as seductive or devotional, erotic elements are present in both groups, yet invoked for

different reasons. In the devotional texts, they reveal an intense religious passion and spiritual intimacy between the writer/speaker and God (*Holy Sonnet XVIII* by John Donne, *The Weeper, On Our Crucified Lord, Naked and Bloody* by Richard Crashaw, *The Dwelling-Place* by Henry Vaughan *Eyes and Tears* by Andrew Marvell); whereas in the seductive texts they express a romantic passion and sexual intimacy between two lovers (*The Country Wife* by William Wycherley, *The Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster, *Enjoyment* by Abraham Cowley, *To His Coy Mistress* by Andrew Marvell, *The Flea* by John Donne, *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* by John Lyly). Thus, it could be stated that the literary wit explored in the selected seventeenth-century literary works is marked by breadth and versatility, since it encompasses a highly intellectual nature and delightful humour as well as deeply-felt eroticism and the most pious spirituality.

In seventeenth-century England, wit was seen as a superior sign of wisdom, loquacity, mellifluousness, smartness, ingenuity, verbal virtuosity and the ability to convey verbally the enigmatic intricacies of human existence. It ensured literary, social, intellectual and even religious recognition for its creators. Witty discourse grew into a fashion penetrating all spheres of life, ultimately becoming a particular way of life. In constructing literary wit, the authors drew their inspiration from various spheres such as medicine (*The Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster, *The Country Wife* by William Wycherley, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* by Francis Beaumont, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* by John Donne, *The Waterfall* by Henry Vaughan, *The Weeper* by Richard Crashaw), geography (*Enjoyment* by Abraham Cowley, *Elegy XIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed*, *Holy Sonnet XVIII* by John Donne, *Dwelling-Place* by Henry Vaughan, *The Weeper* by Richard Crashaw), alchemy (*Eyes and Tears* by Andrew Marvell, *The Weeper*, *Upon the Body of Our Blessed Lord, Naked and Bloody* by Richard Crashaw), astronomy (*Hymn to God the Father* by John Donne, *The Weeper* by Richard Crashaw), geometry (*Waterfall* by Henry Vaughan), law and politics (*The Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster), art (*The Gallery* by Andrew Marvell), and proverbial wisdom (*The Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster, *Wit Without Money* by John Fletcher, *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* by John Lyly) representing in this way their reality through wit and thus also opening up new horizons of artistic thought.

The interpretation of such dense witty discourse is based on a close dialogue, or rather a polylogue as an act of artistic communication engaging multiple interlocutors (the reader/interpreter, the author, the literary text and its contexts) and is dependent on their equally active involvement. The intensity of participation in this communicative act enables the transmission

of the seventeenth-century coded messages passed to the the readers by the writers from the past to be decoded and interpreted. The cultural realities of seventeenth-century England and of recent times are intricately intertwined in the act of artistic communication allowing the reader to reflect on the present situation from the perspective of the past, and the past to be read anew from that of the present. This way, the reader extends the message of a witty discourse, while the latter, in turn, stimulates the reader's intellectual progress and creative potential by configuring his mentality and imagination during the intellectual exercise of wrestling with witty texts.

In drama, literary wit most often operates through the modes of repartee and quip. Overstatement, understatement, self-deprecation, teasing, replies to rhetorical questions, clever replies to serious statements, double entendres and transformations of frozen expressions have also been identified. Two additional modes, namely, self-praise through exaggeration (*The Knight of the Burning Pestle* by Francis Beaumont; *Wit Without Money* by John Fletcher) and courting through repartee (*The Country Wife* by William Wycherley; *The Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster) have been identified and could be added to extend the list of the modes in the taxonomy of wit distinguished by Debra L. Long and Arthur C. Graesser (2009), and the categorisation of literary wit developed by Donald Duane Manson (1966).

In the selected poems, literary wit is conveyed not only by the devices distinguished by the scholars indicated above, but also by paradox (Marvell's *Eyes and Tears*, Crashaw's *On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord*) and the grotesque (Crashaw's *The Weeper*, Donne's *The Flea*). A specific device to transmit literary wit which was identified in the metaphysical poems and devotional prose is conceit. It was worked out through an extended metaphor or simile as a lengthy and ingeniously contrived comparison or an unexpected fusion of opposites based on dynamic fluctuations and intricate transformations of meaning and an ingenious playfulness with language. The poets invoked ideas from various and often very remote branches of knowledge to construct conceits and used them to put forward convincing arguments (Crashaw's *On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord*, *The Weeper*, Donne's *Holy Sonnet XVIII*, *The Flea, Elegy XIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed*). Yet such intricate manoeuvring with language requires a highly developed taste, exceptional sensitivity and agility on the part of the reader to make rapid associations of thought and follow the mazelike passages. Therefore it could be stated that such literary wit disrupts straightforward interpretation and eradicates the prejudice that the reader has brought to the interpretation, instead inviting him to re-examine, experience and only then decode the poem.

It was also observed that the complexity of the structure of witty discourse is closely linked to intricacy of thought. Thus, the mechanism for actualising literary wit in the selected poems involves a combination of various devices or devices within devices, which is especially prevalent in devices that are not self-sufficient such as irony (Marvell's *To His Coy Mistress*) and parody (Donne's *The Flee*). Moreover, literary wit is expressed not only verbally, but also through graphical configuration of the lines of the poem (Vaughan's *The Waterfall*). In such a case, the communicative process becomes even more complex since the reader has to recognise the visual pattern of the poem, its interaction with the verbal elements and only then decode the overall witty message of the text. Such graphic silhouettes allow the poets to experiment with more compact artistic expression of the inexpressible through a merely verbal channel; they also make an abstract concept to be seen as concrete. At the same time, the reader is given a possibility to experience a double aesthetic delight (for the eye and for the brain) gained from the developed graphic contours and the intellectual effort in grasping the intended message.

The shift in the understanding and usage of literary wit becomes evident in the functions of wit distinguished by Long and Graesser (2009) and Manson (1966) and analysed in the selected prose works. While in *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* John Lyly employs wit to establish a rapport between his characters, showcase an attack of one character against the other or defence, Donne uses literary wit in *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* to understand the essence of human sickness, disclose the hidden structures of man's existence, unveil the extraordinary in the ordinary, emphasise religious beliefs and make his Metaphysical thought more vivid and intense.

In the piece of Lyly's prose analysed in the dissertation, literary wit may serve several functions simultaneously such as establishing a rapport and casting light on an important point or ridiculing one character while attempting to establish common ground with the other. One additional function of literary wit, namely, seduction through flirting, which was not mentioned in the categorisation of Manson (1966) or the taxonomy of Long and Graesser (2009) was identified in Lyly's prose work. His expression of wit is distinct for its intended artificiality and reliance on the deliberate imitation of the Classical rhetorical patterns. Using this unique style, Lyly developed the proverbial paradigm which soon became a common literary trend in England. It could be described as an individualised compilation of learned wit which is prefabricated to appeal to noble audiences. Thus, his literary wit is an urban construct featuring excessive mannerism and artificiality. In *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* the author bases his Mannerist wit on a predetermined exuberance of

various literary devices, pseudo-arguments and distorted proverbs. He also uses witty language as metalanguage to reflect on the essence of the discourse of literary wit and deliver a critical account of the usage of witty patterns. Hence, his wit is also self-reflective.

Contrary to Lyly, Donne's wit in *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* could be viewed as an inductive tool employed to understand the interdependence of the physical and spiritual condition and to appeal to his readers for the purpose of edification. The writer builds his Metaphysical wit on mental image making, labyrinthine argumentative texture and startling verbal articulation of intense passionate feelings. His experience is recreated through thoughts and his thoughts are recreated as feelings. Thus Donne's Metaphysical wit reflects a unification of exceptional sensibility. It breaks from any constrains imposed on literary creativity by revealing individual sensations and merging them with the help of his creative intellect and imagination. Difficulty in describing the bewildering complexity of a sick man's critical condition in relation to the eternal condition of the resurrected body requires the participation of witty discourse. Hence, the writer discloses the complex relationship between humanity and divinity by uniting what resists unification and finding divine signs in the most unexpected and often stunning spheres of human life, yet always making them convincing. By interpreting his experience of the disease in figurative terms, Donne is able to comprehend the uncertainties of human life and death and give to these uncertainties a satisfying certainty of resurrection. Therefore his literary wit could be defined as a sophisticated manoeuvring with language itself, which is Metaphysical in its nature. Through it the bodily experience is translated and acquires new value and significance.

All of the above shows that seventeenth-century English literary wit should not be regarded as a pure relic of the past that can no longer communicate to contemporary readers. In fact, it focuses on, and clarifies for them, complex religious, political, moral and social issues that are still highly relevant. Therefore, the author of this dissertation hopes that this research will contribute to the extant research on literary wit and provide a new potential methodological apparatus for the prospective critical scholarship devoted to this subject matter. The thesis aspires to enhance the understanding of literary wit and present an approach to it which might be of interest to contemporary readers, encouraging the development of their aesthetic taste through fresh readings or exciting artistic conversations with the seventeenth-century writers, their witty texts and encoded contexts.

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APPROBATION OF THE RESEARCH

The following **papers** were published on the basis of dissertation research:

1. Astrauskienė, J., Krūminienė, J. (2018). Literary Wit as a Means of Creative Communication in the Selected Seventeenth-Century English Poetic Tradition. In: *English Studies Today: Approaches and Applications 4*, pp. 167-186, ISBN: 978-86-6065-507-5.

2. Astrauskienė, J., Krūminienė, J. (2014). John Webster's Drama "The Duchess of Malfi": The Contexts and Contests of Wit. In: *Respectus Philologicus,* 26 (31), pp. 44-56, ISSN 1392–8295.

The following **presentations** were delivered in conferences on the basis of dissertation research:

1. *Mischievous Wit in the Selected English Seventeenth-Century Dramas.* Presented at the international scientific conference *Thought Elaboration: Linguistics, Literature, Media Expression: TELL ME'17* (2017.05.10).

2. *Literary Wit in the Devotional 17th-Century English Poetry.* Presented at the fourteenth international conference on English and American literature and culture: *New Perspectives in English and American Studies* (Krakow, Poland) (2017.04.22).

3. *Expression of Literary Wit in Selected 17th-Century English Literature.* Presented at the 4th international conference *English Language and Anglophone Literatures Today: ELALT4.* (Novi Sad, Serbia) (2017.03.25).

4. *Ar tikrai sąmojis – žemiausia humoro forma XVII-ojo amžiaus anglų literatūroje?* Presented at the international scientific conference *Thought Elaboration: Linguistics, Literature, Media Expression: TELL ME'16* (2016.04.25).

5. *John Webster's Drama "The Duchess of Malfi": The Contexts and Contests of Wit.* Presented at the international scientific conference *Man in the Space of Language* (2014.05.15).

6. *Wit of 17th-Century Religious Poetry: The Soul in Paraphrase.* Presented at the international scientific conference Thought Elaboration: Linguistics, Literature, Media Expression: TELL ME'14 (2014.04.02).

NOTES