Fatal Fascination or Calculated Choice: The Conceit in Seventeenth Century English Poetry

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This study proposes to re-examine the nature of English 17th century concettism against the background of contemporary insights into the nature of the phenomenon in European Baroque poetry. Typical instances of concettistic patterns in the poetry of English post-Renaissance poets are scrutinized, attention being paid throughout to their most frequent structural functions as much as to their most frequent rhetorical components. The results lead the author to the conclusion that a unified set of poetic motivations, strongly resembling those operating in European Baroque poetry, underly the concettistic practices of numerous English post-Renaissance poets. A wider recognition of the fact may have important consequences for the future study of English post-Renaissance literary developments.

In the literary history of most European countries the term Baroque has by now become a commonly accepted literary-historical designation for the set of literary norms and conventions dominating European national literatures in the decades following the Renaissance.

Perhaps the most remarkable single trait distinguishing the poetry of European Baroque in the domain of style is its concettism, or "the style of *pointes*" (Curtius, 1973: 292) as Curtius terms the dominant stylistic feature of literary Baroque. A careful scrutiny of the stylistic phenomenon in its 17th century English manifestations, a scrutiny of both the forms and the functions of conceits in the total poetic structures in which they occur may, therefore, shed valuable new light on the essential nature of poetic motivations and intentions behind English post-Renaissance literary creation as well as better illuminate the nature of the relationship it bears to contemporaneous literary currents on the continent of Europe. Insights into the nature of English seventeenth century concettism

may thus also provide a decisive contribution to the still open issue of the presence and spread of Baroque in English literature.

Modern literary scholars define poetic conceits as witty and elaborate figurative designs, in which verbal and intellectual ingenuity skilfully combine metaphorism, pararhetoric and paralogism, blending both heterogeneous ideas and heterogeneous images into unexpected new unities.[1]

Favouring ingenious and witty paralogical procedures and pseudological false arguments (*argomenti urbanamente fallaci, topoi fallaci*) and making use of the rhetorical figures of paradox (mainly those classified by rhetoricians as *ornatus , audacior*) these highly complex figurative and conceptual patterns aim at revealing unsuspected new correspondences among contradictory and disparate images and ideas with one ultimate end in mind: to provoke *stupore*, aesthetic and apprehensive *meraviglia*, to articulate some unexpected, startling, aenigmatic — even arcane — new meanings. Among modern Baroque scholars Hugo Friedrich may easily have provided us with the most imaginative and the most exhaustive single description of both the aesthetic intentions and the aesthetic effect of the Baroque conceit, this most representatively Baroque among poetic patterns. About Baroque conceit Friedrich says:

> "Was ein barockes Concetto sein kann, lässt sich folgendermassen umschreiben: es ist eine möglichst abnorme Pointe, ein frappierendes Sinn- oder Gedankenspiel, vielsagend, stechend, ausgefallen, eine gewagte, um Wahrheit unbekümmerte Kombination, eine erzwungene Identität des Verschiedenen, ein Widersinn — je paradoxer, desto willkommener —, ein Verdrängen der Sache und Sachrichtigkeit durch unstimmige, in sich selber rotierende oder naturalisierte Metaphern, ein aus dem Zusammenstoss von Begriffen ohne Anschauung entspringender kalter Funke, eine penetrante, jedoch verrätselnde Anspielung und schliesslich, nach dem tadelnd gemeinten, aber treffenden Vergleich eines damaligen Kritikers, 'ein Anlauf zum Werfen der Würfel, ohne dass der Wurf geschieht'". (*Friedrich*, 1964: 637)

These "specific structures of lyric architecture" (Hocke, 1969: 150) could be achieved by means of various rhetorical devices and by their various combinations. According to G. R. Hocke the conceits are, however, most easily "made" (*fabbricare*) by the use of pseudological false conclusions (paralogisms and sophisms) and by the application of irregular rhetorical figures (or rather more accurately, by the rhetorically irregular application of a certain type of rhetorical figure). Most effective when it contains an unexpected paradox, when the witty point is based on pseudo-oppositions, surprising tropical transformations (naturalized metaphor, abstruse, strained metaphor), deliberate false analogies and witty logical misdirections, the Baroque conceit will indeed display a conspicuous preference for those rhetorical devices, both grammatical and semantic, which are either inherently paradoxical or lend themselves easily to

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1. More extensive examination of the form and structural functions of the Baroque conceit can be found in E.R. Curtius (1963), G.R. Hocke (1969), H. Friedrich (1964), M. Windfuhr (1966) and Z. Kravar (1978).

paradoxical uses. The majority of figures used in conceits fall within the category known in rhetoric as *ornatus audacior* and include those figures whose frequent presence most conspicuously marks off the poetry of the European *seicento*: far-fetched metaphor, *catachresis* and hyperbole among tropes; paronomasia, *traductio*, *distinctio*, zeugmatic enumeration, antithesis, *antimetabole* and oxymoron among repetitive and accumulative rhetorical figures (*figurae per adiectionem*); *hyperbaton*, *parenthesis* and some special types of subordination among syntactic figures (*figurae per ordinem*). It is, however, not solely due to the reccurent presence of these rhetorical figures and stratagems that the Baroque conceit comes to occupy such an outstanding status in Baroque poetry and consequently draws so much exclusive attention to itself in numerous studies of literary Baroque. Its most distinctive feature lies in the domain of its specific structural functions: due to the overall propensity of the stylistic level in the Baroque poetic structure "to exceed the limits of its medium" (Warnke, 1961: 1), the Baroque conceit frequently tends to turn from a piece of rhetorical decoration into the constitutive principle of the entire poetic structure, taking over the role of other structural levels or techniques thereby, in dominating and guiding the thematic progression of the text and the articulation of its central meanings.

Stylistic microstructures in Baroque texts, conceits in particular, tend to exceed their traditional competence in yet another significant way. Not only do they permeate the significatory structure of the text, they also penetrate into genres not traditionally suited to their use (tragedy, elegy, religious poetry genres, for example).

A number of concettistic patterns rely for their effect primarily on the ingenious exploitation of some perfect or approximate sound resemblance. Others are primarily based on some sudden and unexpected tropical evocation (strained, abstruse metaphor, "*Oppositions*"-metaphor[2]), often engrafted upon a piece of dazzling pseudological play of wit. Both kinds abound in English post-Renaissance poetry. A few representative English examples should suffice to illustrate their formal and functional affinity with the distinctive features of Baroque conceits that we have just tried to outline.

Certain instances of homonymy/homophony (ground for *traductio* and *paronomasia*) and polysemy (ground for *distinctio*) in English became — due to their multiple, potentially contradictory or paradoxical meanings — particularly attractive *loci* of witty and ingenious play on words and thoughts in 17th century English poetry. More than occasionally they are also found to constitute the principal instruments of poetic meaning.

Understandably enough, the homophonic pair: 'sun'—'son' heads the list of English homophones, most favoured by English 17th century poets and most frequently played-upon. The potential range of meanings and suggestions inherent in this instance of acoustic identity is almost self-evident, particularly in view of

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2. The term is adopted from G. R. Hocke (1969: 71), who following Tesauro's division, uses it to denote the type of metaphor which brings opposites together.

its religious significance. It is, therefore, easy to see why the perfect sound correspondence of these two words so often served as a source for various ingenious flashes of poetic wit. In the poem entitled "The Sonne" George Herbert even turns this specific instance of sound correspondence in English into an exclusive poetic theme. English 17th century devotional poets, most of them highly educated professional clerics, were, moreover, obviously not completely unaware of the more specific theological elaborations of the Christ—sun analogy, extant in theosophical literature, where Christ was referred to as Oriens and identified with the sun. It is around this double correspondence, though quite unsupported either ethymologically or semantically, that the English 17th century religious poets have constructed a number of intricate patterns of image and idea, most of them genuine poetic conceits. Characteristically enough, the homophonic pair: 'sun'—'son' appears frequently in those more powerfully Christocentric among George Herbert's devotional poems, where it is used as a source of meaningful poetic ambiguity. The multiple significance of the identity between the sun and the Son of God is in Herbert often — as in the poem "Even-song", for example — sustained by its linkage to the figurative motive of light: literally, this light signifies sunlight, daylight and visibility; figuratively, it becomes the source and cause of life, the cause of visibility; eventually (through a further figurative transformation), it becomes a revelation as well as a self-revelation, therefore also — as the figurative cycle approaches its completion — God and the Son of God. The first *stanza* from Herbert's "Even-song" will exemplify some of the structural conditions on which the more subtle poetic meanings in Herbert often rely:

> Blest be the God of love,
> Who gave me eyes, and light, and
> power this day,
> Both to be busie, and to play.
> Buth much more blest be God above,
> Who gave me sight alone,
> Which to himself he did denie:
> For when he sees my waies, I dy:
> But I have got his sonne, and he hath none.

In these lines, the principal aspects of the religious theme (God's power and agency) are conveyed by means of an implicit pun on 'sun'—'son' ingeniously built into a web of related tropical motives — those of light and eye-sight.

The same instance of acoustic correspondence, handled with the same awareness of its theological implications and with a similarly ingenious poetic gesture, is also encountered in the religious poetry of John Donne. Introduced in the form of *traductio*, and used as the basis of the subsequent tropical series, it is found in the sonnet "Ascension" from Donne's *La Corona* cycle where similar acoustically based conceits are generally rather frequent. The 'sun'—'son' homophony underlies a number of other significant equivocations in Donne's religious poetry, as for example, in the poem "Resurrection, imperfect", in the Holy Sonnet II ("As due by many titles") and — perhaps most effectively — in the poem "Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward", where the entire poetic argument

seems to take its direction from the religious implications of this fortunate case of linguistic identity.

The basic thematic conflict, which the poem sets out to resolve, arises from the opposition between the westward journey undertaken, by the poet (the penitent and the sinner) on Good Friday, and the opposite, eastward movement — desired, desirable and apparently only just for a true Christian soul on that day. The East being where Christ is: Oriens, the sun and the Son. The initial conflict eventually dissolves into a pseudo-conflict as Donne — with his usual blend of agile logic and verbal dexterity — argues the fundamental justness of the westward journey: he moves westward not in the willfulness of sin but because of a penitential desire to be scourged.

But it is in the passage from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that we come across undoubtedly the most famous, and semantically most potent example of the 'sun'—'son' pun. The lines are almost too familiar to an English reading public to be in need of quoting:

> But now my cousin Hamlet, and my *son.*
> H a m l e t (aside).
> A little more than kin, and less than kind.
> C l a u d i u s.
> How is it that the clouds still hang on you?
> H a m l e t.
> Not so my lord, I am too much in the *sun.*

The multiplicity of semantic emphasis in these lines seems almost inexhaustive, if it is to be judged by the number of critical comments it has provoked. Practically no critical commentary of the play fails to touch upon at least one of the several meanings radiated by this intricately figured passage. Having different interpretative aims in mind, these commentaries, however, fail to emphasize the utmost thematic relevance of this concettistic pattern in the total thematic context of the tragedy. As in so many other cases, it is precisely through this kind of subtle and ingenious mastery of poetic language that Shakespeare, the virtuoso craftsman, conveys the subtlest and most intricate of his meanings.

The complex rhetorical configuration, consisting of a *traductio* (or rather *asteismos*): 'sun'—'son', a paronomastic pun on 'kin'—'kind' and the metaphoric opposition: sun — clouds, contains thus, compressed into a narrow space of several lines, almost all crucial thematic motives of the tragedy: the unlimited (because it is divine) power of an anointed king (the sun), and the cosmic consequences of its usurpation (clouds); Hamlet's conflicting loyalties of son to his father-king and of servant to the usurper-uncle-king (the 'kin'—'kind' pair with its acoustic near-identity, the 'son'—'sun' pair with its perfect acoustic identity); Hamlet's recognition of both his ominously exposed position and his unique responsibility ("I am too much in the sun"). Their powerful poetic ambiguity turns this and similar image clusters into crucial instruments of dramatic meaning, making of them — in a way typical of Baroque — such instruments on which the total meaning of the tragedy at times vitally relies.

The partially homonymic verbal pair: 'lie'—'lie' is another instance of homonymy in English frequently utilized as the basis of witty conceits and startling *double-entendres* in the 17th century English poetry. Both Shakespeare and Donne, for example, found the potential of comic paradox inhering to the acoustic identity of these words too valuable to resist. Shakespeare's plays abound in ironic, even obscene, *double-entendres* originating there. The following, however, is an example from one of his sonnets:

> Therefore I *lie* with her, and she with me
> And in our *faults* by *lies* we flattered be.
> (Sonnet 138)

The utmost structural effectiveness of the pun is aptly commented on by Patrick Cruttwell: "Of this climactic poem the last couplet with its pun on 'lye' is the very apex; the pun forces together the physical union and its context, as it were, its whole surrounding universe, of moral defilement and falsehood." (P. Cruttwell, 1952: 563).

Donne's anti- and pseudo-Petrarchan love poetry is another context in which we frequently come across the witty use of the same sound identity. The concluding lines from his "Elegie: Loves Warre" are a typical example:

> There *lyes* are wrongs; here safe uprightly *ly*;

It is to the ingenious wit and supreme verbal artifice that these lines owe their rich multiplicity of meaning. As a detailed rhetorical analysis will show the multiple paradoxical equivocation in these lines has been achieved by several typically Baroque figures, all of them from the repertory of *audacior ornatus*. The equivocation rooted in the pun on 'lie'—'lie' (*traductio*) is enhanced by the deliberately ambiguous syntax, by a potential oxymoron ('uprightly ly') as well as by a semantic *chiasmus* serving to intensify the underlying antithetic pattern. The intricate rhetorical configuration here succeeds in uncovering a whole series of ironic contrasts behind apparent resemblance between the real war and its seeming counterpart: the war of sexes. In the real war, for instance, falsehoods (and men lying dead) are "wrongs" (meaning sin and injustice); in the love war people may openly prevaricate (or lie down in embrace) without fear of harm. The ambiguous syntax of the lines will allow further paradoxical variations. If one, further, assumes, that J. Donne was aware — as he easily may have been — of the etymological kinship of the word 'lie' (= recline, lie down) to the words 'law' and 'leaguer', 'beleaguer', the number of potential meanings resulting from the rhetorical operations in these lines becomes indeed impressive.

The ingenious poetic stratagems employed throughout the poem considerably enhance the semantic potency of the final equivocation. In our context incidentally, they also serve as further evidence that Donne's poetry carries the signs of that same kind of conscious and careful craftsmanship ("making"), of that same poetic *maniera* which gives the poetry of European Baroque its most distinguishing hall-mark.

Intent upon pointed, startling, witty poetic expression, a Baroque verbal architect will by no means limit himself to the more evident sources of poetic wit

(*acutezza, arguzia*). As numerous examples of English 17th century conceits prove, such grammatical, semantic and conceptual (pseudo)-correspondences were diligently searched, occasionally even intentionally made. As Dr Johnson with much accuracy and a considerable amount of disapprobation notes, "nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions". (Johnson, 1963: 1054).

English post-Renaissance poetry abounds in witty poetic inventions of that kind. Some are unique in the sense that a poet will devise them for a singular use only, some are also unique in terms of their artistic effectiveness. The following well-known example from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, undoubtedly belongs to the latter category as well:

> Hath Romeo slain himself? Say thou but *ay*,
> And that bare vowel *I* shall poison more
> Than the death-darting *eye* of cockatrice.
> *I* am not I, if there be such and I;
> Or those eyes shut that makes thee answer ay.
> If he be slain, say ay, or if not, no.

Juliet's passionate inquiry from her nurse when she fears the news of Romeo's death contains a most ingenious fourfold pun (figure *traductio*) utilizing the perfect homophony of the four etymologically and semantically unconnected lexical items:

(1) the old word for yes (ay);
(2) the first-person pronoun (I);
(3) the vowel (i);
(4) the organ of sight (eye).

Sustained by the twofold *poliptoton* (on the lexical items "I" and "ay"), this intricate piece of verbal acrobatics reflects Juliet's extreme emotional turbulence with superlative aptness. "The frenetic dislocation of apprehension" (Spencer, 1967: 41) in these lines has often enough been called attention to in terms of its full psychological justification. Much less frequently attention has been called to the fact that these kinds of verbal labyrinths, present in Shakespeare's poetry in such conspicuous aboundance, imply an outstanding degree of ingenious artifice and verbal combinative skill, that, in other words, his specific handling of language resources implies a highly conscious stylic choice underlying Shakespeare's poetry as well as much of the poetry of his contemporaries.

Wittily utilized instances of polysemy (the basis of the figure *distinctio*), occasionally combined with an effective instance of *traductio* on one of the homophonic pairs, and almost as a rule blended with a complex and often startling tropical pattern, can be found to underly the more powerful and effective among 17th century English conceits.

John Donne's Holy Sonnet IV ("Oh my black soul") is a typical example. As often in Donne's poetry, the thematic development of the poem relies almost entirely on the characteristic figurative design in which the witty handling of the words 'to read' (verb) and 'red' (adjective) plays the most outstanding part. The ingenious pun based on the acoustic correspondence between the past form of the

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verb 'to read' and the adjective 'red' (*traductio*), combined with the triple *distinctio* (the skilful interplay of the literal and figurative meanings of the adjective 'red') of the concluding lines, operates effectively in the articulation of the main poetic theme: the painful emotional ambivalence racking the sinful soul at the approach of death and the imminence of the Last Judgement. This basic ambivalence is sustained throughout the sonnet by means of a witty "colouristic" scheme extravagantly intertwining the literal and symbolic meanings of the three traditional Christian colours: black, white and red. Thus, black indicates both the foulness of sin ("Oh my black soul", line 1) and — being the traditional colour of the pilgrim, the prisoner and the penitent — the desire for penitential purification ("Oh make thy selfe with holy mourning black", line 11); white is the result of symbolic cleansing, therefore of innocence; red, however — clearly the dominant colour in the poem — undergoes a series of varied and sudden semantic transformations, which the ambiguous syntax and the erratic logic of the poem help to emphasize: red is the colour of sin and remorse ("red souls", line 14); it is also a less exclusively Christian, physically manifest signal of shame and humiliation ("And red with blushing", line 12); at the same time it is the colour of Christ's blood, thus both the symbol of redemption and the miraculous alchemical substance acting as a tincture ("it dyes red souls to white", line 14).

It is on these multiple semantic transformations of the word 'red' supported by the ambiguous syntax and the deliberately erratic logic of the text, that the sonnet relies for its most specific meanings and its overall subtle paradoxality. It is, in short, the poetic conceit — ingeniously spun out of the figurative potential of the word 'red' and an instance of its acoustic identity with a semantically and etymologically alien lexical item ('to read') — that we find constituting the principal instrument of meaning in the poem.

As the above quoted examples as well as numerous others show, it is an attractive instance of polysemy taken hold of and elaborated with ingenious pseudologic (paralogism or enthymeme being the base) and almost as a rule accompanied by some less frequent form of trope (an "Oppositions"-metaphor, for example) that makes the witty point, frequently also the elaborate conceit familiar from so many poetic texts of English literary *seicento*. The ingenious utilization of the rhetorical figures and stratagems mentioned, resulting in ironic paradox, calculated shock and meaningful equivocation is particularly frequent and popular with those among 17th century English poets generally inclined towards the witty, pointed ("*scharfsinnig*") variant of Baroque style. It is less frequent in the poetry of John Milton, Richard Crashaw and Thomas Traherne, for example, where the amplifying and accumulative rhetorical patterns ("*Schwulst-metaphorik*")[3] predominate, but the poetry of William Shakespeare, John Donne, George Herbert, Andrew Marvell, Robert Herrick or Thomas Carew abound in it.

John Donne's Holy Sonnet IV ("Oh my black soul") is a typical example

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3. The distinction between "*scharfsinnige*" and "*Schwulstmetaphorik*" is adopted from M. Windfuhr (1969). Windfuhr views both sub-types as differently modulated manifestations of the same underlying tendency — characteristic of Baroque — to disrupt the Renaissance stylistic balance.

The next two examples will no doubt appear familiar to everyone even remotely acquainted with English 17th century poetry. The deliberate effect of aesthetic and cognitive *meraviglia*, achieved by a peculiar blend of startling thought and the distinctly Baroque, audacious, figuration makes of these poetic patterns veritable instruments of the poetic exploration of reality, truly "the constitutive mode of apprehension" (Hauser, 1965: 297); at the same time it also reveals them to be genuine models of Baroque conceit in the strictest and most approbatory sense.

The first is an example from Donne's "Elegie: The Autumnall", one of his most famous and most delicately touching poems:

> Call not these wrinkles, graves; If graves they were,
> They were Loves graves; for else he is no where.
> Yet lies not Love dead here, but here doth sit
> Vow'd to this trench, like an Anachorit.

In her *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* R. Tuve emphasizes the rhetorical skill, the apparent "artificiality" and the careful pattering in these lines as well as the impressive functional effectiveness of the key image in its relation to the whole (Tuve, 1972: 33). However, her consistent and prolonged effort to prove both the Spenserians and the Metaphysicals to be practitioners of the same poetic and rhetorical ideal, blinds R. Tuve to the radical novelty of the meaning resulting from the unorthodox structural use of the rhetorical devices, which she recognizes in these lines and enumerates with such painstaking precision.

Considering the amount of analytical effort provoked by them, the following lines from Andrew Marvell's famous pseudo-pastoral poem "The Garden":

> Annihilating all that's made
> To a green thought in a green shade.

represent an even more intriguing single example of the inventive force and ingenious subtlety with which a mannerist poet handles words and ideas.

Originating in a typical Baroque combination of *audacior ornatus* figures: catachresis, antithesis and *distinctio*, this concettistic pattern of Marvell's succeeds — especially if viewed against the totality of its poetic context — in generating a genuine web of meanings sufficiently shadowed and convoluted to present a permanent explanatory challenge.

Even when isolated from their immediate context which substantially widens their semantic spectrum, the lines quoted here contain a high degree of semantic tension generated for the most part by their deliberately paradoxical figurative pattering. Meanings (mostly figurative) that the word 'green' connotes in its abstruse catachrestic alliance 'green thought': meanings like Latin *viridis*, not only green in colour, but also youthful, fresh, lively, vigorous; meanings also like tender, immature and innocent, all undergo rapid and sometimes startling modifications owing to the juxtaposition of the acoustically related but semantically quite remote 'green shade' of the following line. In the syntagm 'green shade', (the repeated) 'green' literally signifies the green colour, whereas

the syntagm as a whole — easily recognizable as a metonymic substitution for a tree shade, thus also for some pleasant green landscape, quite unmistakably identifies the garden as the place in which 'a green thought' occurs. This garden in the poem is the very real garden of the Lord General Fairfax; at the same time it is the ancient archetypal symbol known to us from various Western mythological, religious and poetic traditions, a complex iconic sign which the poem — by continual witty metamorphosis of metaphor and motive — identifies in turn as the Garden of Eden, the Earthly Paradise before Eve; as the Stoic, Epicurean as well as Platonic garden of philosophical solace and meditation; as the garden of Canticles or even more exclusively Christian *hortus conclusus*, the enclosed garden as a symbol of the Virgin, the contemplative retreat of the devout spirit in search of spiritual purity and wisdom lost through sin. Quite unmistakably, however, the garden of Marvell's poem also carries — and precisely that is the source of the central paradox in the poem — the properties of the pastoral *locus amoenus*, from the time of ancient poetry celebrated as a place of sensuous pleasure, a *dignus amore locus*.

The startling paradox that such fusion of heterogeneous traditions of the garden figure generates, culminates in the lines quoted from the sixth stanza — with their ingenious use of semantic pun and tropical evocation. But it is something else besides this witty exploitation of the rhetorical figures of paradox that marks off Marvell's poem as a representative example of subtle and versatile Baroque inventiveness. The entire poem turns out to be an ingenious generic *novum* of the type frequently encountered in Baroque literature. Arguing his main theme — the superiority of meditative solitude to the busy life in society — Marvell does not only wittily utilize the rhetorical sources of paradox such as abstruse metaphor, meiosis, catachresis, *distinctio* and antithesis; he also opposes and combines generically heterogeneous poetic conventions and *topoi* in a manner which in terms of traditional poetics constitutes an undeniable breach of poetic decorum.

Encomiastic, satyrical, Petrarchan and pastoral elements as well as the tropical and conceptual allusions to the diverse traditions of the multiplex garden figure are all present in the poem. Not at all accidentally, the poem has been the cause of much critical discussion and a frequent object of rival claims, having in turn been called Christian, Buddhist, Hermetic, Cartesian, pastoral and anti-pastoral.

This rivalry of diverse claims on the poem can, however, easily pass into a new perception of its nature, once the particular structural functions of heterogeneous elements in the poem are carefully observed. In Marvell's lyric, namely, as in so many other poems of the period, the remote tropical and thematic motives are transformed in a specific way and turned into lexicalised elements and poetic false arguments (*argomenti fallaci*), instrumental to the progression of a novel poetic theme. This kind of genre mixture, directly related to the overall concettistic tendencies of style in Baroque poetry, is a commonly recognized distinctive feature of Baroque, and it involves practically all literary

genres. It, therefore, seems to be quite justified — in view of its most distinctive features — to regard Marvell's "Garden" not just as a typical example of Baroque poem in English literature, but as a supremely successful one as well.

Some examples of intricate concettistic patterning in the poetry of two English *seicentisti* have even become the focal point of a significant theoretical controversy, centred precisely on the issues of the poetic motivations underlying the style of the English Metaphysicals. The polemic between Rosemond Tuve and William Empson (in the *Kenyon Review*, 1949—1950) culminated in radical disagreement over the poetic intentions behind a recurrent image in Donne's poetry and a conspicuous instance of figurative organization in a devotional poem by George Herbert.

Herbert's "Sacrifice", particularly stanza 51, presents the first very concrete point of the controversy. A detailed analysis of the stanza appeared originally in W. Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, in a chapter introduced by the following suggestive exegetic hints: "The seventh type [i.e. of ambiguity] is that of full contradiction, making a division in the author's mind. Freud invoked. Examples (pp. 198—211) of minor confusions in negation and opposition. Seventh-type ambiguities from Shakespeare, Keats, Crashaw, Hopkins and Herbert." The following passage exemplifies Empson's analytical method well:

> "He climbs the tree to repay what was stolen, as if he was putting the apple back; but the phrase in itself implies rather that he is doing the stealing, that so far from sinless he is Prometheus and the criminal. Either he stole on behalf of man (it is he who appeared to be sinful, and was caught up the tree) or he is climbing upwards, like Jack on the Beanstalk, and taking his people with him back to Heaven." (*Empson*, 1956: 232)

R. Tuve's glosses on Empson's interpretation contained some rather harsh tones and went beyond that particular interpretation of Herbert's lines to include the entire implicit critical theory. In opposition to Empson, she argued that the lines from Herbert's "Sacrifice", like the great majority of Metaphysical religious poems, represent poetic elaboration of a religious paradox quite sufficiently traditional and decorous — both theologically and rhetorically — to render critical conclusions such as Empson's misplaced or at best irrelevant.

A functional stylistic analysis, an analysis that is, intent not only on recognizing the presence of specific rhetorical and stylistic figures but on accommodating their full structural effects as well will, however, strongly support Empson's basic impression that Herbert's manner of handling his theological and rhetorical material in these lines is by intention somewhat removed from the orthodox, and that the outcome may consequently be unorthodox as well, not completely excluding connotations genuinely shocking to an orthodox religious consciousness.

4. For more extensive discussions on the genre mixture in Baroque see: P. Pavličić (1975) and U. Schulz—Buschhaus (1985).

Let us look at the controversial stanza:

> O all ye who passe by, behold and see;
> Man stole the fruit, but I must climbe the tree;
> The tree of life to all, but onely me: .
>   Was ever grief, etc.

The first line is an almost literal Biblical reference, Jeremiah saying: "all ye that pass by, behold, and see" (*Lamentations*, I, 12). The rest of the stanza, however, progressively departs from the initial Biblical literalism. The first part of the four-part antithesis, "man stole the fruit", is still a comparatively conventional Christian emblem signifying the Fall and its fatal consequence.

The second element of the antithetical pattern ("but I must climb the tree"), though ostensibly the traditional opposition to the first, on closer scrutiny turns out to possess a perceptibly different figurative structure, consequently also a different, profoundly ambiguous and much less traditional meaning. "Man stole the fruit", in short, is the traditional Christian emblem; the second antithetical member is only provisionally that — and at the cost of omitting the profounder part of its meaning, primarily gained from its polyvalent position in the overall antithetical scheme. All attempts, namely, to correlate the figurative and literal planes of the antithetical scheme in such a way as to make them yield a consistent meaning will result in a paradoxical, alogical or absurd semantic situation. The ingenious and no doubt deliberate verbal manoeuvre, in short, makes of an ostensibly perfect emblematic opposition an evasive and chimerical one, leaving ample space for quite unorthodox paradox and startling connotation. This profound ambiguity is further intensified by the antithesis contained in the remaining line of the stanza. With its audaciously and richly equivocal 'tree', borrowed from the previous antithetical pair, the final antithesis becomes more than a means of additional emphasis. It, in fact, serves to modify and further multiply the already rich paradoxical possibilities generated by the initial pair of (pseudo-)opposites.

Paradoxes, including the paradoxes of faith, undoubtedly contain a good amount of contradiction by themselves. Empson may still be right when concluding that, though generation after generation of poets and liturgists had handled the same theme, there is little resemblance between those renderings and the startling clash of concepts and images distinguishing Herbert's poem (Empson, 1950: 735). The features, like Herbert's, however, frequently characterize the religious poetry of the Baroque.

The second concrete point of the Tuve — Empson controversy is John Donne's recurrent use of the word 'world' in its various senses, particularly those which allow the poet to contrast subtly and ingeniously the small world (an individuum or a pair of lovers as microcosm) and the big world (humanity or universe as macrocosm). Both her basic theoretical proposition and her rigorous, rhetorically based method of stylistic analysis, incline R. Tuve towards regarding Donne's poetic handling of the word 'world' and his use of the microcosm — macrocosm analogy as a traditional and decorous poetic image.

The combination of meiosis, irony and some less common types of *amplificatio* procedures ("violent diminishing figures", R. Tuve calls them) which almost without exception accompany Donne's use of this traditional motive are in R. Tuve's view perfectly suited to the argumentative dialectic of Donne's texts in which the motive usually occurs, and should, therefore, not be construed as a violation of the Renaissance principle of poetic decorum. The only feature of Metaphysical poetry that for R. Tuve admittedly constitutes a departure from the strict Renaissance canon is its marked generic preference for middle- and low-style poetic kinds (*genus deliberativum*, philosophical *genus humile*, paradoxical encomium and other genres of satire). It is to this change of generic preferences and the progressive disregard for the carefully observed genre distinctions of the Renaissance poetics that the stylistic options of the Metaphysicals in her opinion should exclusively be attributed. "In other words", R. Tuve thus concludes in her *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery*, "many appearances of rugged, homely, harsh or violent qualities in the diction of Metaphysical poems are to be referred not to changed theories of poetry but to the conventional theories concerning the 'low' style proper to poems in the satirical kinds" (Tuve, 1972: 243). Neither the remarkable changes in rhetorical selections nor the noticeable generic shift she herself repeatedly refers to, constitute for R. Tuve a sufficiently firm ground for justifying the claims of stylistic innovation in Metaphysical poetry, let alone for justifying the claims of a more general change in poetics or *Weltanschauung* underlying this changed poetic style.

In Empson's view, on the other hand, Donne's repeated use of the microcosm—macrocosm analogy, particularly the extravagant and subtly ironic meanings that Donne ingeniously supplies the image with, must have been related to something rather fundamental in Donne's thought and undoubtedly deserve to be regarded as not just a signal of stylistic change, but as a signal of innovative treatment of an idea as well. The philosophical truth of the macro-cosm—microcosm analogy itself was already seriously questioned in Donne's time. The witty, paradoxical manner in which Donne skilfully exploits the (pseudo-) contradictions and false correspondences inherent in the analogy, even calling into doubt its very fundamental philosophical implications, is for Empson an almost certain sign of the poet's deeply rooted spiritual scepticism, the scepticism growing out of philosophical and ethical pluralism of the times and permeating the entire period (Empson, 1949: 586). To illustrate Empson's point it will suffice to refer to a few typical examples of Donne's exploitation of the microcosm-macrocosm motive. Elaborated by means of several, by now familiar Baroque figures — naturalized and hyperbolic metaphor, antithesis and several typical repetitive schemes, the motive is encountered, for example, in one of Donne's Holy Sonnets:

> I am a little world made cunningly
> Of Elements, and an Angelike spright,
> But black sinne hath betraid to endlesse night

> My worlds both parts, and (oh) both parts must die.
> You which beyond that heaven which was most high
> Have found new sphears, and of new lands can write,
> Powre new seas in mine eyes, that so I might
> Drowne my world with my weeping earnestly,
> Or wash it if it must be drown'd no more:

The rapid succession of various senses contained in the key-word together with the feverish, erratic logic of the text make the poem radiate a range of equivocal meanings, both sinister and joyful.

The microcosm motive appears in an almost identically elaborate and witty rhetorical form in one of Donne's best known love poems entitled "The Good-morrow":

> For love, all love of other sights controules,
> And makes one little roome, an every where.
> Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
> Let Maps to others, worlds on worlds have showne,
> Let us possesse one world, each hath one, and is one.
> My face in thine eye, thine in mine appeares,
> And true plaine hearts doe in the faces rest,
> Where can we finde two better hemispheres
> Without sharpe North, without declining West?

Here, the basic connotations the image emanates are not at all unlike the ones suggested by it in the Holy Sonnet quoted above. There is a profound ambiguity surrounding this separate microcosm of love, the world eternally victorious and momentarily doomed at the same time.

One crucial point about the Tuve — Empson controversy has by now, we believe, become clear: a fruitful dialogue between R. Tuve's rigorous historicism and her equally rigorous rhetorically based analytical method, on the one hand, and Empson's consistent ahistoricism followed by his occasionally over-imaginative and lax interpretative procedures on the other, could not be sustained for long. The controversy about the basic poetic intentions behind those elaborately figured images in the poetry of George Herbert and John Donne thus ended without consensus, and the question of the exact literary-historical position of the Metaphysicals has seldom been raised again after that.

The examination of literary motivations behind very similar stylistic and generic features in the poetry of other English *seicentisti*, notably in Shakespeare's poetry, has led to similar disagreements. Some aspects of verbal and intellectual play in Shakespeare's literary work, his frequent punning in particular, have for instance claimed aboundant attention and analytical effort. The very number of 3000 instances of wordplay that M.M. Mahood (1957) has found in the Shakespearean canon convincingly testify to the persistance of that stylistic tendency in Shakespeare. Some more exclusively linguistic studies of Shakespeare's poetry indicate with a sufficient amount of certainty that the real number of instances of ingenious wordplay and related concettistic designs in Shakespeare's work is even much higher, taking into account the fact that the

changes of pronunciation and word-meanings, occurring since that time, have concealed numerous cases of Shakespeare's brilliant verbal inventiveness.

In his study of Shakespeare's language, G. L. Brook (1976) draws attention to several interesting examples of that kind, pointing out that the presence of some significant equivocation, ironic allusion or witty point can today still be inferred from the immediate context or the effect the expression has on other characters. The following is an example quoted by Brook to illustrate the point: in *As You Like It*, one of the characters, Jacques, reporting Touchstone, says:

> And so from houre to houre, we ripe, and ripe,
> And then from houre to houre, we rot and rot,
> And thereby hangs the tale.
> (AYL II.7.16)

This statement of Touchstone's causes Jacques to "laugh, sans intermission An houre by his diall". An hour's laughter may still appear excessive, but it is much more understandable in light of the fact that the statement contains a threefold bawdy pun. The word 'houre' was, namely, pronounced like 'whore' in Shakespeare's time, there were also two verbs 'ripe', one meaning 'ripen' and the other 'search', whereas a 'tale' contains a pun on 'tail' (Brook, 1976: 173.).

Only occasionally, and almost by incident, the utmost thematic and compositional relevance of Shakespeare's frequent concettistic patterns has been noted by some English and American scholars involved in the study of Shakespeare's work. It has thus been observed that comic wordplay in Shakespeare's tragedies in fact seldom serves the purposes of sheer comic relief (Muir, 1950). Mahood's detailed analysis of wordplay in Shakespeare has led the author to conclude that the most complex and powerful instances of the poet's wordplay, and the most effective *double-entendres* in his poetry often serve to present some essential conflicting issue of the play, or even to give specific emphasis to a dominant idea of the play as a whole. As a rule they are also the unmistakable signals of spiritual crisis in the tragic hero. It can hardly be accidental that Hamlet, the very prototypal man of spiritual crisis and double vision, of intellectual scepsis and ethical dilemma, turns out to be the most persistent and ingenious punster among all of Shakespeare's tragic characters. Cleanth Brooks (1947) has also tried to show, analyzing two elaborate figurative patterns — both genuine Baroque conceits — in *Macbeth*, how such ingenious figurative designs, frequent in the moments of culminating dramatic crisis, aptly operate to intensify, often even to articulate the central dramatic conflict of the play. Organically related to some reccurent metaphor in the play, these image-patterns become the basic means of textual progression of the play, the very mode of its existence. On the whole, however, Dr Johnson's severe strictures on Shakespeare's quibbling still seem to weigh heavily with modern Anglo-American critical judgements, barring this aspect of Shakespeare's *ingenio* from gaining the critical attention it deserves in view of its outstanding structural significance.

G. R. Hocke, on the other hand, seems to find in Shakespeare's poetry the creative culmination of that ingenious and carefully mannered poetic gesture for which he proposes the term *sprachliche Illusionsperspektive*, to substitute the

inadequate English 'pun' (Hocke, 1969: 93). This persistently multiple verbal and conceptual perspective is for Hocke a sure symptom of verbal and spiritual scepticism, the poetic response to an age of shattered spiritual security and lost faith.

In his readiness to root the most distinctive stylistic features of European post-Renaissance poetry in the specific spiritual and social context of its time and in the specific nature of its social functions, G.R. Hocke is not isolated. The conception of European Baroque art (mannerist, in Hocke's and some other terminologies) as an aesthetic objectification of a profound spiritual crisis, brought about by the rapidly changing world-view and the consequent conflict of opposed truths, has dominated a considerable part of Continental European study of the period ever since the concept of "time spirit" was introduced by the *Geistesgeschichte* thinkers in the 1920-es. Variously modified, the conception has been reappearing in the studies of those literary scholars in particular who were primarily concerned with the cultural and spiritual background of Baroque literature rather than with the particularities of the stylistic typology of poetic structures themselves.

There is hardly any doubt that the Baroque artist, so fully aware of the principles of his own art as to be able to reflect on them repeatedly within his poetry, was also quite aware of the crucial issues and dilemmas occupying the minds of his contemporaries and that he consequently attempted to respond to them in the way he found best suited both to his, and to the nature of the problems.

However acceptable on theoretical grounds, the conception of Baroque art as an artistic reflection of profound spiritual and verbal scepticism of the age has met with considerable difficulties. Categories such as "an aesthetic objectification of the particular world-view" or "an artistic response to the central issues of the time" are not of the type liable to an immediate verification, and the interpretations of the period based on them have consequently aroused radical difference of opinion.

In view of the present lack of agreement on the issue of the position that English post-Renaissance literary developments occupy within their European context, the analysis of these developments via the stylistic and generic categories sufficiently observable to avoid disagreements about their presence or absence seems to promise better results. Analysis of representative instances of English 17th century conceits, from the point of view of both their rhetorical configuration and their structural functions, seems, in short, to support strongly the assumption already made by scholars such as R. Daniells, L. Nelson and F. Warnke about the close affinity of English concettism with the similar practices in European Baroque poetry.

In view of both their high frequency and the high degree of ingenuity and combinative skill manifesting themselves in their conceits, we, moreover, feel quite justified in concluding that with the 17th century English poets the concettistic expression was a matter of a deliberate stylistic choice, rather than "the fatal Cleopatra" for which — in Samuel Johnson's phase — William

Shakespeare, for one, irresponsibly "lost the world, and was content to lose it"; to which, moreover, he was ready to sacrifice "reason, propriety and truth".

Several factors have intervened to make the recognition of common European features· in English post-Renaissance poetry a difficult and slow process. They include the comparative political and cultural isolation of England at the time, certain Anglo-American theoretical and methodological considerations, some specifically English terminological traditions, John Dryden's and Samuel Johnson's strictures on some of Donne's and Shakespeare's poetic procedures; and last, but perhaps not least, the superior poetic talent of some English practitioners of concettism — the talent enabling Shakespeare or Donne to arrive at their own, unique poetic solutions within a convention.

It is one of the commonplaces in the methodology of literary history that the entire set of literary norms and conventions manifesting themselves in a literary period or a period-style is never fully realized in a single work of art, whatever its aesthetic excellence. This fact, however, does not contradict the assumption that even the greatest individual artists share a common set of poetic norms and standards with their less gifted contemporaries. "To work within a given tradition", as R. Wellek and A. P. Warren point out, "is perfectly compatible with emotional power and artistic value" (Wellek and Warren, 1949: 271).

The fears, voiced occasionally by English and American scholars, that the acknowledgment of supreme artistic value of some English 17th century literary achievements might be threatened by attempts to establish their link with a certain literary tradition, can safely be put aside. On the contrary, such a task might help us apprehend better and admire more the power of a great artist to utilize and transform a common set of instruments and rules.

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KOBNA OČARANOST ILI SVJESTAN IZBOR: KONČETO U ENGLESKOJ POEZIJI 17. STOLJEĆA

Učestalost končeta u engleskoj poeziji 17. stoljeća poznata je činjenica. U članku se, međutim, nastoje preispitati poetičke pretpostavke engleskog postrenesansnog končetizma u svjetlu novijih spoznaja o naravi tog fenomena u poeziji evropskog baroka. U analizi tipičnih končetoznih shema engleskih postrenesansnih pjesnika pažnja se — iz specifičnih razloga — nastoji posvetiti ne samo njihovu retoričkom sastavu već i njihovim unutartekstualnim funkcijama. Analitička provjera navodi na zaključak da se u končetizmu engleskog 17. stoljeća konzistentno objektiviraju poetičke motivacije veoma srodne onima koje se danas najčešće vezuju uz poeziju evropskog baroka. Općenitije bi prihvaćanje te spoznaje neosporno utjecalo na današnje tumačenje nekih književnih tokova engleske književnosti 17. stoljeća.