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The Uncertainty of Wit in Baltasar Gracián y Morales

Uncertainty is the cornerstone of Baltasar Gracián's understanding of wit. The questions this paper addresses are: 1) what are the consequences of this uncertainty; 2) why something as shaky, minute, and elusive as a witticism became the pinnacle of both the sublime and "worldly wisdom" for Gracián?

The author starts with the comparison of the modern notion of wit and the metaphysical wit (in the English-speaking tradition), or the compound wit in Gracián.

Thence the author outlines difference between wit and the comical. This differentiation carried out by Freud brings us to his work *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious* where the father of psychoanalysis draws parallels between "wit-formation" and "dreamwork." Among other things, wit resembles dreams in its practice of avoiding censorship of the conscious. However, wit never plunges completely in the unconscious and thus not only hides from but also provokes the unconscious.

Another phenomenon from the domain of Momus that also deals with censorship is the Rabelaisian laughter that, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, liberates "from eternal censorship." And yet, wit is not like this laughter at least in two aspects: 1) wit doesn't destroy its rival, like the Rabelaisian laughter, but keeps it to play with it—otherwise, it would no longer remain witty; 2) the Rabelaisian laughter is carnivalesque, it is part of the popular culture—wit is antipopular, it is elitist, and Gracián illustrates it in a parable from "The Master Critick."

The paper ends with the argument that Gracián's wit was the only weapon against definitive disbelief and definitive censorship of his time. The compound wit that the author also calls transcendental gave Gracián hope for something infinite in the cynical world of finiteness that surrounded him. This infinity was achieved by the unique structure of wit, which is its uncertainty.