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**Wit and esprit: points of accord and dissonance**

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I believe that what Addison really suggests is that under certain conditions mixed wit can be of a considerable aesthetic value. The key means of achieving this value is surprise. The element of surprise and novelty are in fact the key features of Addison's aesthetics which he develops in some of the later issues of the *Spectator* journal. However, it is another issue, adumbrated in his earlier work (in this case his *Georgics* essays published in 1693), which proves McCrea's claim dubious at the very least. There is one clear hint in the *Essay on the Georgics* that tells us what direction Addison's later criticism is to take. After quoting a passage from the second *Georgics*, he writes:

Here we see the poet considered all the effects on this union between trees of different kinds and took notice of that effect which had the most surprise and, by consequence, the most delight in it, to express the capacity that was in them of being thus united. [...] This is wonderfully diverting to the understanding, [...]. For here the mind, which is always delighted with its own discoveries, only takes the hint from the poet, and seems to work out the rest by the strength of her own faculties. (*The Works of Joseph Addison* I 156-7)

The stress on the element of surprise, as William H. Youngren rightly observes, "was later to be canonized, under the name of novelty, along with greatness and beauty, as one of the three great sources of the 'Pleasures of the Imagination'" (Youngren 273).

To claim that Addison believes that literature, or art as such, should not provide surprise to its consumer is therefore to seriously misread his ideas on literary art and, consequently, to misunderstand his aesthetics in general. I believe that McCrea – not unlike C. S. Lewis – overlooks the distinction between the sphere of everyday communication, in which ambiguity can be a source of serious and potentially harmful misunderstandings, and the sphere of literature, in which it is welcome as a source of artistic value. I believe that his emphasis on the motives of Addison and Steele's striving at clarity of speech is important but perhaps needs to be slightly modified. It is true, of course, that the two authors had a wide accessibility on their minds when producing the texts of the *Spectator*. However, given the nature of the paper, its genre and purpose, as they were stated at the beginning of this subchapter, I suggest we see this choice of style as a *proto-journalistic*, not purely *literary* strategy. In this respect Addison's text differs from Pope's significantly – unlike the latter poet Addison writes *about* wit, but does not demonstrate it at the same time.

### 3.4 Wit and Esprit: Points of Accord and Dissonance

This subchapter offers comparative reading of the theories and ideas on wit and *esprit* as they appeared in the texts analyzed in the two previous chapters. As I already pointed out in the Introduction, my primary concern is to stress what is different in the authors' opinions rather than to stress presumably obvious similarities. My hypothesis was that the image of wit and *esprit* will be – despite the fact that the two words have similarly

complex etymology and operate in cultures sharing many characteristic features – at least partially disparate. The objective of this subchapter, then, is to point out and pursue these points of dissonance in order to come up with a closing argument concerning the relation of the two terms. I will nevertheless begin this subchapter with an account of the influence of French literary criticism on its English counterpart by summarizing the views of Dryden, Pope, and Addison in order to the general background of my subsequent analyses.

The readings which follow the introductory section of this subchapter are meant to juxtapose the texts analyzed Chapters 2 and 3 while utilizing the suggestions and contexts I introduced in the theoretical chapter, thus interconnecting all the parts of the thesis. Bringing together the contexts of wit I proposed for consideration in the first chapter with the ideas on both of the terms in their specific historical settings in the two analytical chapters will hopefully yield some previously over-looked perspectives on the English term which has been the centre of my interest. In addition, I hope the comparative analysis will throw some new light on the ways in which wit is theorized by the contemporary literary criticism and, also, that it will possibly offer some fresh insights into the individual authors and their work.

### 3.4.1 The French Criticism in England: The Question of Influence

The question of the influence of French criticism in England of the second half of the seventeenth century is a rather precarious one. The general opinion is that, unlike in poetry and drama, where the English were unwilling to give up primacy to the French, in matters of literary criticism their ideas were heavily informed by the French critical output. Thus for example A. F. B. Clark claims explicitly that “[e]ver since the resumption of literary activities with the return of Charles II in 1660, the eyes of Englishmen turned towards France as the source of critical light” (233), describing the situation as one of a complete and unabashed imitation:

[f]rom 1660 onwards, the English criticism derives practically all its theories and laws from France. Almost every French critical work is translated into English after its appearance and often goes through several editions in translated form during the eighteenth century. It is not till the second half of that century that systematic doubts begin to be expressed regarding the value of the French critics. (ibid.)

Similarly, J. W. H. Atkins suggests that as a result of the influence of the French criticism, “a new field of literary inquiry was opened up in England; a new direction was given to critical studies; and currency was given to fresh doctrines relating to [...] new standards of literary judgment” (Atkins 70). The situation, as perceived by contemporary critics themselves, was one filled with tensions, often of national character, already hinted at Bouhours’s account of *bel esprit*. Thomas Rymer in the preface to his 1694 translation of Rapin’s *Réflexions sur la poétique d’Aristote* (1674) sums it up in a light,

jocular tone; however, it is important to remember that this was a true nature of the situation surrounding the status of critics and criticism in the last third of the seventeenth century:

● The Author of these *Reflections* is as well-known amongst the *Criticks*, as *Aristotle* to the *Philosophers* : never Man gave his judgment so generally, and never was judgment more free and impartial. He might be thought an Enemy to the *Spaniards*, were he not as sharp on the *Italians* ; and he might be suspected to envy the Italiand, were he not as severe on his own Countrymen. [...] (Rapin, *Monsieur Rapin's Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie In General* 5)

With regard to the English critics, Rymer observes, clearly with personal interest at stake, that “till of late years England was as free from Criticks, as it is from Wolves, that a harmless well-meaning Book might pass without any danger” (2).

Among the English authors, whose texts were analyzed in this chapter, it is mostly John Dryden who generally speaks up for the French critics and their achievements. In his *Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* (1692), he pays a tribute to the French critics in going back to his early struggles with the problems of composition:

when I was myself in the rudiments of my poetry, without name or reputation in the world, having rather the ambition of the writer than the skill; when I was drawing the outline of an art, without any living master to instruct me in it; an art which had been better praised than studied in England [...] when thus, as I say, before the use of the vast ocean, without any other help than the pole-star of the ancients, and the rules of the French stage among the moderns. (Clark 234)

In the *Dedication to the Aeneis* (1697) his admiration for the French critics is expressed with sheer sincerity: “For impartially speaking, the French [critics] are so much better than the English, as they are worse poets” (ibid.). Alexander Pope belongs to a new generation of critics, who familiarized themselves with the precepts of the French neoclassicism early in their careers and as much as they were influenced by them, they constantly challenged them in their works. Thus in the *Essay on Criticism* he makes a bold statement regarding the resistance of the English to the French writing that “critic-learning flourished most in France, / The rules a nation born to serve, obeys; / And Boileau still in right of Horace sways. / But we, brave Britons, foreign laws despised, / And kept unconquered and uncivilized, / Fierce for the liberties of wit and bold, / We still defied the Romans as of old” (712-8). Similarly Joseph Addison, usually respectful towards the French critics, now and again becomes uneasy about the constant repetition of “diction, design, unities” and his patience gives out occasionally as in the following passage from the *Spectator* No. 291: “A few rules extracted out of the French authors, with a certain cant of words, has sometimes set up an illiterate heavy writer for a most judicious and formidable critic” (*The Spectator* I 205). Therefore, even though the modern critics usually evaluate the influence of the French criticism on the English literary scene of the Restoration period as one of unequivocal agreement, it is important to keep in mind that the actual situation was one of conflicted nature filled with tensions, be it of personal, national or artistic character.

Boileau's *L'Art poétique* and Pope's *Essay on Criticism*: Wit and language

What connects *L'Art poétique* and *Essay on Criticism* on a general level is their common interest in pursuing the matters of poetic production and literary criticism and also a long-established commonplace that there is not much originality of thought or contribution of new literary theories in either of them as they both function rather as collecting tank of the already proposed theories. However, by the title of the poem, not *An Essay on Poetry* but *An Essay on Criticism*, Pope is differentiating himself from the tradition in a new perspective. He appears to be raising the 'Art of Poetry' to the second power. Wimsatt and Brooks comment: "In actuality the notion of 'criticism,' when scrutinized, very readily becomes transparent, focusing telescopically on the more concrete matter of poetry itself, so that what Pope says is actually *De Arte Poetica*" (*Neoclassical Criticism* 236). This manoeuvre cannot be found in Boileau's poem, transparently titled *L'Art poétique*.

As the analyzed texts by Boileau and Pope show, wit is repeatedly theorized as a two-part concept with one part tending towards unbridled creative impulse which suffers no restraint and the other part towards suppressing it. Thus they oppose the philosophies of John Locke and Thomas Hobbes, described in the first chapter of the thesis, both of which ascribe the dangerous, creative impulse to what they call Fancy or Imagination, while reserving the controlling, restrictive force to Judgment. This definition of wit has been contested not only by Pope and Boileau, but also other French critics. For example La Rochefoucauld, in his *Réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales*, rejects the separation of the two mental faculties, claiming that

We are deceived if we think that mind and judgment are two different matters: judgment is but the extent of the light of the mind. This light penetrates to the bottom of matters; it remarks all that can be remarked, and perceives what appears imperceptible. Therefore we must agree that it is the extent of the light in the mind that produces all the effects which we attribute to judgment.<sup>96</sup> (59)

However, even he was not consistent in his opinion and often dissociated wit from judgment, for example in maxim no. 258 he says that "[g]ood taste arises more from judgment than wit"<sup>97</sup> (170).

If we agree to link the more unstable part of wit to the act of poetic creation and the more controlling part to the act of criticism, it becomes clear that Pope, though balancing the two parts of wit in order to keep within the confines of the neoclassical doctrine of harmony, manages to playfully smuggle the creative part into the poem. Thus, a text which is titled *Essay on Criticism* is in fact a poetic exercise in witty writing. A similar concern is absent from Boileau's poem and the tone of the poem is far more prescriptive than playful. The question of creative attitude towards language is a very complex one and cannot be successfully answered at this moment. However, it might be noteworthy to consider a claim of Rupert D. V. Glasgow who – with regard to the language of James Joyce, Samuel Beckett and Jonathan Swift – argues that they all should be sited in "[...] an Irish tradition, the Gaelic roots of which seem to have been

conducive to a predominantly playful attitude to language and to be responsible for the Anglo-Irish heritage of wits” (*Madness, Masks, and Laughter* 80). While avoiding sweeping generalisations, I wish to suggest that in Pope’s poem which is officially a treatise of literary criticism but factually an exercise in verbal wit, there is some evidence to support Glasgow’s – modified – claim that the Anglo-Saxon tradition of language relishes in witty verbal jocularity. Thus, both Pope and Dryden, while avouching their respect for the neoclassical doctrines based on reason and rules, can be found sinning against them in their own artistic texts. This paradox is one of the reasons for the tension surrounding the literary criticism of the analyzed period of English literature.

By coming back to the issue of *esprit* not having a similarly wide range of meanings compared to wit in Pope’s and Boileau’s texts (wit is said to have seven meanings, while *esprit* only four with the sense of neutral ‘mind’ being the prominent one) or, by means of generalisation, in French literary theory of the second half of the seventeenth century, we also come back to the English term’s more unstable usage in relation to gender categories which I demonstrated in my analyses. We see that the impuls for unrestrained playfulness is inherent to the English mind which puts up a constant fight to subdue it by heightening the feature of control. To carry the point even further, I would suggest that this may be the reason for the uneasiness to theorize wit in a neutral manner in some of the critical studies which we witnessed in the chronological summary of the twentieth-century approaches presented in the first chapter. However, this proposition would deserve a more thorough investigation in order to produce some solid and conclusive results. At this point, I will have to leave it in the form of suggestion for future research and continue with my comparative reading of the two terms.

### 3.4.2 Wit and Esprit as Signs of Advancement in English and French Culture

Another point of difference can be drawn between the question of progress of the French Court as reflected for example by the account of *esprit* in Méré’s *Discourse de l’Esprit* and the process of refining wit as a sign of progress of English literature and its language, represented in various critical writings of John Dryden. From this point of view, both terms were seen as ‘signs of quality’ – to borrow an expression from Richard Scholar – in case of the French culture, it was part of the discourse of the French Court; in case of the English culture, the appraisal was connected directly to the literary sphere. More importantly however, they were both related to the merging of the literary and social, mentioned in the introduction to the second chapter with relation to how *esprit* was theorized in the works of Dominique Bouhours and chevalier de Méré. Another expression for quality that encompasses both the ideal of noble and pleasant conduct and the proper style in a work of literary art is *decorum*. There are many similarities between the concerns and criteria of *decorum* and wit and *esprit*. Originating in rhetorical theories of Aristotle and Horace, *decorum* is what prescribes which style is appropriate to which subject and is responsible for the requirements of purity of genres – one of key rules of

neoclassicism. Social decorum prescribes limits of appropriate social behaviour within a set situation.

In Méré's *Discourse de l'Esprit* the term *esprit* is used to emphasize distinction between the illusory and genuine beauties of the contemporary French Court in comparison to the old one. Speaking about the current tastes of the members of the polite circles, the critic observes that "[w]hat we are told about the old Court does not suit the taste of our ladies"<sup>98</sup> (19). "But finally one can be sure that there was little wit at the old Court"<sup>99</sup> (20-1). Summarizing the development of the advancement of French culture, the Court and *esprit* become the key criteria: "How can it be then that this Court is so different to that which used to be in the old days? Henry the Great who was a good judge of all things, and who never studied anything but the art of war, and the late king methinks did not contribute to it very much. The Prince whom we have seen, had a delicate wit and would say excellent things"<sup>100</sup> (23).<sup>\*</sup> However, Méré distinguishes the 'true beauties' ('vrais Agréments') from the false ones; the true advancement of the Court is associated with the first sort: "The Court has therefore made some progress concerning wit and galanterie, but it was achieved under the great Prince who is admired by the world, and who has plenty of true beauties"<sup>101</sup> (ibid.). Eventually the Court emerges from Méré's account as a symbol of 'shining falsehood' ('un faux brillant') which often passes for true *esprit*: "Shining falsehood which is born out of confused and volatile imagination, passess easily for agreeable wit, provided that one observes closely manners of the Court, and the majority of those who are more skilfull [...], are convinced that they do not need more than to have studied hard in order to acquire wit"<sup>102</sup> (45). This reading of Méré's relationship to the polite society confirms what was proposed earlier with respect to the critic's sceptical attitude towards the metropolitan way of life. The falseness, artifice and ingenuity, both of social conduct and as its aesthetic representation are socially localized in Méré. It might be interesting to trace relationship of the dichotomy of the city and court versus the country to *esprit* from political perspective in other Méré's texts and correspondence as the Court usually associated with the King and powers of the State.

Among the English authors, it was John Dryden who first employed the term wit to differentiate between past and present achievements in the sphere of social conduct and aesthetics. For instance, in *Defence of the Epilogue. An Essay on the Dramatick Poetry of the Last Age* attached to *Conquest of Grenada* (1672) he writes that "[i]f Love and Honour now are rais'd, / 'Tis not the Poet, but the Age is prais'd. / Wit's now arrived to a more high degree; / Our native language more refin'd and free. / Our ladies and our men now speak more wit / In conversation than those poets writ" (*Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays* I 89). I have suggested that Bloomian anxiety of influence might be in play in Dryden's conception of the poetic tradition and the role wit serves in it. Dryden's relationship towards his precursors, although not one of depressed alarm, suggests a certain amount of tension, as exemplified by these lines: "We acknowledge

<sup>\*</sup>) The Prince here is Louis XIV (1638 – 1711), the 'Sun King', the late king is Louis XIII (1601 – 1643), and Henry the Great is Henri IV (1553 – 1610).



them [Shakespeare, Fletcher and Jonson] our fathers in wit; but they have ruined their estates themselves, before they came to their children's hands" (I 85). If Harold Bloom claims that "the covert subject of most poetry for the last three centuries has been the anxiety of influence, each poet's fear that no proper work remains for him to perform" I suggest to expand this estimation in order to include Dryden and his generation of fellow poets defying the weight of poetic achievement of the previous authors (Bloom 148). In general, however, wit is regarded by Dryden as a useful element in the process of dissociation from the older generation of authors. In the works by Alexander Pope and Joseph Addison analyzed earlier in this chapter, this relationship is similarly conflicted, and the distinction between what is considered genuine wit and what only passes for it in relation to the past and present constitutes a great part of both of the authors' discussions of wit.

Alexander Pope distinguishes between wit as 'fancy or conceit' and another kind "consider'd as propriety" which is the "better notion of wit" (*Correspondence of Alexander Pope* 34). The former kind is the "wild heap of wit" based on conceits and 'glitt'ring Thoughts' (*An Essay on Criticism* 289-91). This is the wit of the generation of the Metaphysical poets which is generally rejected by Pope, even though he is forced to make an exception personified by John Donne, who had "definitely more Wit than he wanted Versification" (quot. in Meyer Spacks 127).

Joseph Addison's relationship to the poetic heritage of the the Metaphysical poetry as an expedient of his distinction between the right and wrong type of wit can be grasped in three issues of the *Spectator* series on ballads - Nos. 70, 74, and 85. Seeing it as a pendant to the already analyzed series on wit (Nos. 58-63), Alfred B. Friedman suggests that "[a]ll the three ballad papers are permeated with an animus against the 'Gothic manner of writing' against those who have 'formed to themselves a wrong and artificial taste upon little fanciful writers and authors of epigrams.' These are the readers who (No. 70) are 'unqualified for the entertainment' afforded by an ordinary song or ballad" (Friedman 5). In the *Spectator* No. 74 Addison writes: "Had this old song been filled with epigrammatic turns and points of wit, it might perhaps have pleased the wrong taste of some readers" (*Spectator* I 290). To emphasize the wrong taste of those who prefer the poetic devices of the out-dated sort, Addison repeats: "If this song had been written in the Gothic manner, which is the delight of all our little wits, whether writers or readers, it would not have hit the taste of so many ages, and have pleased the readers of all ranks and conditions" (295).

In the texts of Nicolas Boileau and Dominique Bouhours *esprit* does not to fulfill the role of the meter of good and bad poetry or taste. In Bouhours's texts, the two pairs of friends (Ariste and Eugene and Philanthes and Eudoxe) sometimes use the term *jeu d'esprit* to express the chief failures of the foreign, mostly Italian and Spanish variants of Metaphysical poetry. Thus when analyzing the hero mourning his his lady's death in Tasso's epic poem *La Gerusalemme liberate* they criticize the flowery language full of conceits which in their opinion clashes with the tragedy of the scene: "Tears and Witticisms are very disagreeable Company, and grief has no occasion for such Points"<sup>103</sup> (*The Art of Criticism* 48). *Jeu d'esprit* is also associated with the excess of this deplorable wit and



does not agree with the more natural, less ingenious *esprit*: “[T]he Heart explains it self ill by a turn of Wit, and I wou’d willingly say with a Man of Good Judgment. I don’t love such a far-fetch’d beginning, above all in a violent passion in which Sprightliness has no part”<sup>104</sup> (*The Art of Criticism* 171).

### 3.4.4 Wit and Esprit: Terminology of New Taste

In generalized terms, it might be said that the dilemmas of wit analyzed in this study are the result of clash between what Peter France calls “demands of truth-telling and sincerity and those of persuasive communication” of language (3). This is certainly true as far as the underlying philosophical principles explored in the first chapter are concerned. A satisfying explanation of these dilemmas, particularly with regard to the comparative point of view of this subchapter, must include discussion of the forming aesthetic category of taste and the role which wit played in it. We have seen the dichotomy of what the English early modern authors call true and false wit serve as a demarcation line between the old and new poetic styles and types of taste. In the French, this dichotomy is captured by the difference between the terms *esprit*, which has much wider ring of meanings than the English wit, and *jeu d’esprit*, which stresses the verbal playfulness associated with the general idea of false wit more explicitly than its English equivalent.

#### Esprit, bel esprit, and jeu d’esprit

I have already suggested in my comparison of the use of wit and *esprit* in Pope’s and Boileau’s texts that *esprit* assumes the neutral meaning of ‘mind’ more often than wit. This applies as well for theories on *esprit* of François de La Rochefoucauld who in his *Reflections on Various Subjects* provides an extensive classification of various types of minds according to their qualities. When faced with the task to describe the *bel esprit*, La Rochefoucauld’s account testifies to the general complications related to vagueness of the term: “The expression ‘Bel Esprit’ is much perverted, for all that one can say of the different kinds of mind meet together in the ‘Bel Esprit.’ Yet as the epithet is bestowed on an infinite number of bad poets and tedious authors, it is more often used to ridicule than to praise”<sup>105</sup> (La Rochefoucauld, *Reflections* 84). The English translation seems to be equally awkward, as the term *esprit* is translated as both ‘mind’ and ‘wit’ within the space of a single paragraph, even though it clearly has the same meaning in all five instances:

There are yet many other epithets for the *mind* which mean the same thing, the difference lies in the tone and manner of saying them, [...]. Custom explains this in saying that a man has *wit*, has much *wit*, that he is a great *wit*; there are tones and manners which make all the difference between phrases which seem all alike on paper, and yet express a different order of *mind*.<sup>106</sup> (*Reflections* 84, emphasis mine).

Concerning terminology used to express aesthetic appreciation, *esprit* turns out to be similarly unreliable and unstable as the *bel esprit* as my analysis of the aesthetic theory of Dominique Bouhours in the second chapter suggested: the *je-ne-sais-quoi*, the *sublime*, *délicatesse* share features too similar to allow clear and unambiguous distinction of individual traits. *Bel esprit* seems to emphasize the social dimension of *esprit*, it never assumes a neutral meaning, very often stands for a person, and in such a case it is a person of a very specific character. Similar to *honnête homme*, the *bel esprit* rarely assumes female identity or is described with adjectives associated with it.

### True and false wit

Looking back at Dryden's definition of wit, Pope writes: "True wit, [...], may be defin'd as a Justness of Thought and a Facility of Expression; or [...] a perfect Conception with an easy Delivery" (*The Correspondence of Alexander Pope* 2). The dichotomy of 'true' and 'false' appears in embryonic stage in the theories of Dryden, who wavers between conflicting positions on what qualities wit should be associated with. By modifying Dryden's definition, Pope makes it clear that his ideas on the matter of appreciation are much less foggy, even if they are often compromised by the irrepressible impulse to deploy or appreciate the more material, sensuous and subsequently more volatile kind of wit. Addison's contribution to the classification of the terms is the most conspicuous, if not trouble-free. Delineating very obvious differences between true and false wit, Addison falls into a trap of his own making by introducing third, 'mixed' type of wit only to. Associated mainly with punning, i.e. wordplay and the mode of verbal playfulness which generates ambiguity and destroys clarity, mixed wit is condemned as harmful. At the same time, nevertheless, Addison allows this mode to retain some aesthetic value by connecting it with the elements of novelty and surprise, key features of his neoclassic aesthetics.

The adjectives 'true' and 'false' help to diversify what in fact are the two opposing yet complementary components of wit – the tendency towards verbal playfulness, and rejection of literal meaning in favour for metaphorical mode of expression, and hence ambiguity. This falseness is associated with Metaphysical poetry which, at its worst, was based solely on the principle of verbal ingeniousness, and was governed by the urge to display one's ability to produce never before used images and metaphors. In the fashionable society, such ability was highly valued for its immediate effectiveness. As some of the authors – Méré in particular – demonstrate, it was also a type of ability which was associated with superficiality and excessive artifice both from the point of aesthetic expression as well as social conduct. The excess of external ornamentalization or exaggerated expressivity – be it of poetic language or a style in the form of far-fetched conceits or one's demeanour in the form of affectation – was what made 'false' wit incompatible with the requirements for natural and well-balanced aesthetic mode. On the other hand, 'true' wit signifies what is genuine, unstudied and unpretentious. It is not subject to the ambition to draw the audiences' attention to oneself at all costs. In the sphere of aesthet-

ics, it exercises a command over both creative and receptive qualities. As a concept, it is more complex than false wit, as it *de facto* includes some of its features but pairs them up with the restraint of intensity, measured expression and sober rationalism. The balance of these two elements is what makes wit ‘true’, i.e. a valuable and respected aesthetic concept.

To my knowledge, there is no equivalent to the systematic approach to this terminology as exemplified by Addison’s series on wit in the French aesthetic texts of the early period. What seems to be obvious, then, is that *jeu d’esprit* is the equivalent of false wit. As for true wit, I believe that it is covered by one of meanings of *esprit*; and there is no attempt on the part of the authors analyzed in this study to come up with a qualitative adjective to emphasize their approval. One obvious reason for this may of course be that there was never a need for such a term, as the expression *jeu d’esprit* was sufficiently distinctive as well as suggestive in its explicit acknowledgment of the element of play. The term *bel esprit* seems to be specifically related to the sphere of social contact in the French context, more specifically with the polite circles represented by the *précieuse* salons and the Court. There is no original equivalent of this term in the English language, but it was adopted and became part of more or less historical terminology where it exclusively described a cultivated, witty or clever person who uses the mind creatively.

