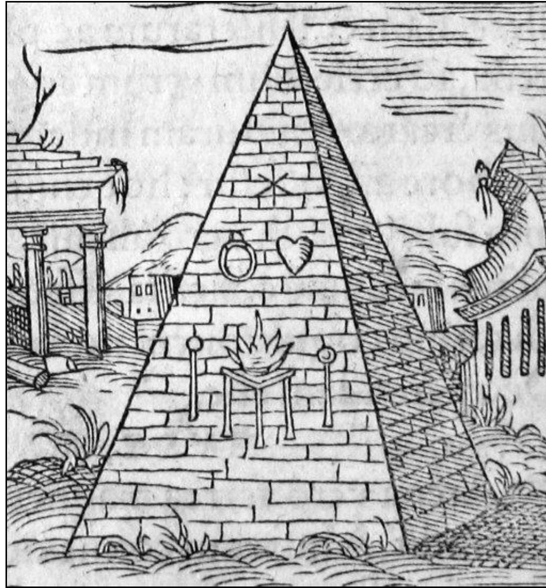

6. *The Literary Tradition*

In this Chapter I review some of the principal literary threads of the period which are relevant to our theme. They have several characteristics in common. They are anthologies or collections of short pieces the rhetorical origin of which we have just discussed. They are all symbols in the sense that they are short pieces which point a moral or spiritual message requiring interpretation in one or all of the four classic modes. They were cited by contemporaries (Menestrier, Tesauro, Gracian, Bruno and many others) as genres the nature of which should be expounded and compared in any review of theories of symbolism and finally they formed links in the chain of development of both format and content of the final and classic literary expressions of symbolism, the emblem and device. I review here only the principal categories of these collections and describe in passing a number of others, the enigmas, sentences, similes and parables.

Despite the distinctions between these categories made here and by contemporary commentators, we should note that the boundaries between them were not rigid and there were many works which did not fall neatly into any category and contained elements of several of each. How, for instance, should we classify *Fables et emblemes en vers* by Pierre Sala

written at the turn of the 16th century which consisted of epigrammatic poems about animals and illustrated them with a proverb?

· Epigrams ·

Epigrams were a genre of Greek poetry which endured over the whole period of classical culture and later. They originated as epitaphs carved on tombstone and monuments[1] but developed into a genre of short, witty, poems often with some kind of moral message. In view of this origin, epigrams were classified by some commentators as Lapidary Art,[2] (Latin lapidus = stone) to be distinguished from the Symbolic Art which dealt with images. The combination of the two, when the inscription gave soul to the body of the image represented the ultimate in literary ingenuity.

Collections of epigrams existed from the first century BC and what is now called the *Greek Anthology* contains the bulk of surviving pieces with about four thousand five hundred examples from three hundred authors. It originated in the 10th Century in the collection of Constantine Cephalas but his manuscript was lost to the West until a copy was rediscovered in about 1616 in the library of the Count Palatine of Heidelberg. This is now named the Palatine text and was published in full in 1776.[3] Another abridged version in seven books prepared by the 14th Century monk Maximus Planudes[4] was discovered and published in 1497 in Florence by Jean Lascaris and this version was used as a source book by many Renaissance writers including Alciato and his followers. Many Renaissance writers published translations of some or all of the epigrams from the Anthology. One of these was that by Henry Estienne and an achievement

[1] Making copies of the inscriptions on classical monuments or epigraphy as it was called was one of the favorite pastimes of enthusiastic intellectuals during the Renaissance. As a young man, Alciato himself indulged in a collection of epigraphs from monuments in Milan and these formed the basis of some of his own emblems.

[2] For instance, Tesauro 2 and see Laurens 2000 279

[3] One of the references in the Palatine Anthology is to the tombstone of Diophantus the Alexandrine mathematician who lived c200-c280 AD. His book *Arithmetica* was translated into Latin in 1575 and it was in a copy of this book that Pierre de Fermat wrote his famous note referred to as Fermat's Last Theorem. See Aczel 32

[4] Planudes was the abbot of a monastery in Constantinople and was zealous in collecting manuscripts for the monastic library. In addition to his work on the *Greek Anthology*, he discovered the only remaining copy of Ptolemy's *Geography* as well as a number of other lesser Hellenistic works. He wrote a commentary on Diophantus' *Arithmetica* as well as his infamous Life and Translation of Aesop (page 157).

of which he, Estienne, was particularly proud was a translation in 106 different versions of a single epigram![1]

Figure 21 The stranded dolphin. Emblem 166 from the Minos edition of Alciato's *Emblemata* (1577).

Alciato also translated more than one hundred and fifty of the epigrams from the *Greek Anthology* for a collection which was published in 1529 and forty emblems in the first edition of Alciato's work came from the same source. By the 1550 edition, which was the last that Alciato himself edited (he died in 1550) forty-six of his emblems were based on epigrams. As an example we can take Alciato's Emblem 166 from the Edition of 1574 which has the commentary of Claude Mignault who had latinized his name as Claudius Minos.

In eum, qui truculentium suorum periret

(On him who perishes from his own errors)

Delphinem invitum me in littora compulit aestus
Exemplum infido quanta pericla mari.
Nam si nec propriis Neptunius parcit alumnis
Quis tutos hominis navibus esse potet?

Here is the translation by Barker and Feltham[2] of the poem of Alciato which he had of course already translated from the Greek original by Antipater of Thessalonika from the 1st Century BC found in the Anthology

> The ocean swell has driven me, a dolphin, against my will to the seashore, a lesson in how great are dangers held by the treacherous sea. For if Neptune does not spare even his own children, who can imagine that men are safe in boats?

We can compare this with a translation by Alistair Elliot of the Greek original

The waves, the rough surf swept me on the shore,

[1] Henri Estienne, *Epigrammata Graecae* 1570. There was an earlier prose edition in 1566.
[2] See the Alciato web page of the University of Nova Scotia at www.mun.ca/Alciato (3/11/2004).

a dolphin-emblem of our common fate.
But on land there's room for pity: those who saw
wreathed me with flowers piously for the grave.
The sea bore and destroyed me. Who would trust it?
It wouldn't spare even the child it fed.

It is noticeable that the title of the emblem points a moral which is contrary to that of the associated epigram. In the title, the dolphin is blamed for his own fate whereas in the epigram the responsibility lies with the sea itself or at best points to the capriciousness of fate. It is this tension between the different elements of the emblem which the emblem writers aimed at, a tension designed to stimulate further contemplation of the whole ensemble.

Each emblem writer put his own spin on the motif. Whitney in his *Choice of Emblemes* copies the Alciato epigram but adds a further verse to illustrate the common and self-serving complaint of poets the world over including the emblem writers that they were not accorded the honor which they deserved and thus frequently were reduced to penury. His subscriptio ends:

So famous men that long did beare the swaie
Hath bene exiled and liv'd in habit pore:
This SOCRATES: and TULLIUS[1] tri'de:
DEMOSTHENES, and thousandes moe beside.[2]

The dolphin had been a favorite symbol of classical times. The myth of Arion tells of the traveler who was thrown overboard by the seamen on his ship and rescued by dolphins which thereafter were regarded as a particular friend of man.[3] This story was again a very popular resource for the emblem writers.

It is possible that the origin of the name Delphi, the site of the great Oracle, is derived from the Greek *delphinos,* dolphin, from the time when Apollo the founder of the Oracle, had been transformed into a dolphin as he crossed the sea on his way to the site of the oracle. The generous nature of the dolphin also accounted for its prevalence as a Christian symbol and we shall see it used as part of one of the most famous printer's marks of the age, *Festina Lente*, the dolphin entwined around the

[1] During the Middle Ages and much of the Renaissance Marcus Tullius was thought to be the name of the Roman author Cicero.
[2] Whitney Emblem page 90 (Whitney's emblems are not numbered).
[3] See Alciato's 11th Emblem in the first edition, Whitney's page 144.

anchor, the mark of Aldus, the Venetian printer. The dolphin was also a device of the Dauphin, the heir apparent to the throne of France.[1]

Alciato's use of epigrams in both his emblem book and his translations for the Cornarius edition of epigrams were carefully chosen to be of three types.[2] First, there was what was called *ecphrastic* description,[3] or the description of works of art in poetry (of which there were many in the *Greek Anthology)* and in Alciato's case the description of statues which he had noted in his earlier days examining classical monuments.[4] Secondly, there were symbolic funerary epigrams such as the Lion from the tomb of Leonidas with the pun in the Latin for lion, *Leo*, and finally where there was an ingenious conceit or twist, for instance, a dead tree surrounded by a living vine symbolic of friendship surviving death.

Figure 22 The pictura of an emblem from the first edition (1531) of Alciato's *Emblemata*. Friendship endures even after death**.**

There were many other lesser collections of epigrams from authors ancient and modern which were used as material for the emblems including for instance the *Epigrammatum Liber* written by the Florentine Poet Naldus Naldius 1436-c1513[5] and two books of epigrams written by Bernadino Dardano (1472-1535), *Favor humanus in dialogo* and *Dialogus in spem* both printed in the first decade of the 16th Century but the best known

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[1] See Massing 1995 which is a discussion of a manuscript written for the Dauphin of France who was to become Francois 1st.

[2] Laurens and Vuillemer 86

[3] The ecphrastic genre is characterized particularly by the work of the Greek writers Philostratus (the eldest dated c175-245 AD). There were several members of the same family with this name and at least two wrote parts of a book *Imagines,* Images*,* describing the pictures they had seen on a fictitious journey throughout the classical world.

[4] For instance, Emblem 62 (from the later editions) *In fidem uxoriam* originated from Alciato's own collection of epigrams from Milan.

[5] Ijsewijn 111

were the epigrams of the Spanish writer Martial (1st century AD) who has been called the Ovid of the proletariat. He wrote some 1400 Latin epigrams many of which have always been characterized as salacious but this does not detract from their subtlety, variety and wit. The first publication of the *Epigrammaton* of Martial in the West was in the 1470's, translated and edited by Niccolo Perotti and Pomponio Leto and the former also wrote a commentary on Martial entitled *Cornucopia* published in 1489. Perotti was the secretary of the great humanist and book collector, Cardinal Bessarion, and his erudition was such that he has also been considered as the author of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili.*[1] Perotti's son Pyrrhus published an expanded edition of the *Cornucopia* which included the delightful remark that "with commentaries of this sort, the longer they are the better". Alciato's 49th and 190th Emblems[2] are derived from Martial's epigrams and are particularly apposite since in both cases they are based on descriptions of *Emblemata* which as we shall see was a Greek word meaning a unique form of inlaid metalwork and which was the origin of our present word.

Of the many hundreds of emblem books published during the 16th to 18th Centuries, a minority were without images. These are often called naked emblems and as such are hardly distinguishable from collections of epigrams. Francis Thynne published such an emblem book in 1600 which was indeed called *Emblemes and Epigrames*. Giordano Bruno's *Degli' Heroici Furori*, the Heroic Furies, was another such work; a small portion of the book is devoted to emblems and it had in place of the actual image a description of the image.

· Fables and Parables ·

The history of the fable in the West originates of course with Aesop who is believed to have been a historical figure born a slave in about 620 BC although the place of his birth is uncertain. According to one possibly mythical story, he was made a freedman and rose to become a prominent political as well as literary figure in the court of Croesus, king of Sardis. He is said to have developed his fables during the course of his diplomatic duties. The first written version of the fables, probably made by Demetrius of Phalerum, a pupil of Theophrastus, appeared about 300BC and

1 Perotti's most successful literary work was his *Latin Grammar* which was published in more than 150 editions.
2 See Cummings in *Emblematica* in 10, 2, 1996 270

thereafter there were many further versions and imitations up to the end of the Roman period. Even at this early date at least some of these versions were illustrated since Philostratus in his *Imagines* specifically comments on illustrated fables[1] and indeed Menestrier in his *L'Art des Emblèmes* of 1662 confirms that "the pictures of Philostratus could pass for emblems although they contain fables."

Figure 23 Young Aesop and the Philosopher taken from *Aesop Vitae et Fabulae* of about 1466-67, one of the earliest printed editions of Aesop by Zainer.

The fables of Aesop passed into the medieval tradition in two threads: the Latin version by Phaedrus, a Roman slave from the 1st Century AD, and the Greek version by Babrius. The Phaedrus, which was particularly popular during the Renaissance, was remarkable for several reasons. Rather than just translate or versify the tales he had picked up, Phaedrus added his own interpretations and in many cases changed the tenor of the stories. The true Aesopian fable follows a consistent format; it mercilessly describes the fate of those who are weak or stupid. It almost never makes moral judgments on the actions of the participants. By contrast, Phaedrus, the product of a more stable and secure society than that of Aesop 700 years earlier, in many cases changed the emphasis of the stories to illustrate ethical themes. Also, as Phaedrus continued his writing, he introduced stories which had nothing to do with the tradition of the fable. There were anecdotes about famous people, witty aphorisms and jokes. However, far from becoming the celebrated author that he

[1] See Van Vaeck in *Emblematica* 7, 1, 1993 33 and Loach in *Emblematica* 2, 2, 1987 332. *Icones Philostrati*, Pictures of Philostratus, was first printed in 1517.

had obviously hoped far, Phaedrus' name and his collection were slowly lost in the Middle Ages. In so far as his stories were known at all, they circulated in prose under the pseudonym 'Romulus' and the true authorship was not rediscovered until late in the Renaissance.

Thus during the Middle Ages little or nothing is heard of Aesop until the 14th Century when Maximus Planudes who, as we have seen also rediscovered the *Greek Anthology* (page 154) published a collection of the Fables and a life of Aesop. This biography, which describes Aesop as a deformed monster, is generally regarded as a complete fabrication and caricature. The principal source of Planudes collection is now known to be the collection of the two hundred twenty fables written in Greek by Babrius in the early Christian era and recently rediscovered in a manuscript in the library of a monastery on Mount Athos. Babrius' collection is now known to be the origin also of the fables which were used as reading material for medieval students as a part of the study of rhetoric[1] and which were transmitted through the Middle Ages through the poetry of Avian composed about 400 AD.

FABULA DECIMA SEXTA.
Ovis, Cervus, & Lupus.

FRaudator homines cum avocat, ſponſore improbo,
Non rem expedire, ſed mala videre expetit.
Ovem rogabat Cervus modium tritici,
Lupo ſponſore: at illa, præmetuens dolum:
Rapere atque abire ſemper adſuevit Lupus;
Tu de conſpectu fugere veloci impetu;
Ubi vos requiram cum dies advenerit?

Figure 24 Aesop's fable: the stag, the sheep, the wolf. From the first illustrated edition printed in Holland with the commentary of Phaedrus. Over each illustration in this copy a title has been added in manuscript by a later writer transforming it into a personal emblem book.

A large number of the fables, such as the ones which refer to monkeys, camels and lions, certainly derived from non-Greek sources. Aristotle, for instance, writes of 'Libyan stories' and Aesop's fables as two separate but similar genres. Some came from sources earlier than Aesop, for instance "the Hawk and the Nightingale", which is from Hesiod and "The Gnat and the Bull" which supposedly is derived from Sumerian sources some 2,000 years before Aesop. Others were added to the corpus at a later date, such as "the Fox and the Woodcutter" from the *Liber Facetiarum*, the Book of Jokes, by Poggio Bracciolini.

Bracciolini (1380-1459) was a Secretary to the Papal Curia and we shall meet him again as one of the most enthusiastic book collectors of

[1] Over 100 manuscript copies of these student manuals survive. Spiegel 6

the Renaissance. But his most celebrated achievement, certainly for his contemporaries, was his *Facetiae,* Jokes, written in Latin in the 1450's and printed 20 years later. This was a collection of several hundred short, mostly bawdy and supposedly true stories which was circulated all over Europe and enjoyed such popularity that serious scholars such as Erasmus and Gesner felt the need to express disapproval of the book and indeed ultimately it was placed on the Index. The *Facetiae* were in the tradition of a genre of humorous short stories popular in the late middle ages, also called *ridicula, nebulae* or *nugae*, going back at least to an 11th Century collection of poems called the *Carmina Cantabrigiensia* or Cambridge Songs.

Some contemporary writers were happy to acknowledge the *Facetiae* as a valid art form rationalizing that they, the writers, were so industrious that they were entitled to some light relief. It is possible to detect the origin of many individual emblems in the joke books of the time although writers did not find it difficult even here to extract a moral lesson from the incidents depicted. The *facetiae* are certainly a legitimate area of our inquiry since as Aristotle said jokes are a form of wit, wit as we shall see is a form of metaphor and metaphor is the driving mechanism of the literary symbol.

Here, to give you the flavor of this high literature, is one of Poggio's *Facetiae.*

> The father of a friend of ours had an intimacy with the wife of a downright fool, who besides had the advantage of stuttering. One night he went to her house, believing her husband to be away, knocked loudly at the door and claimed admittance, imitating the cuckold's voice. The blockhead, who was at home, had no sooner heard him, than he called to his wife, "Giovanna, open the door, Giovanna, let him in, for it does seem to be me.[1]

But it was also an honorable tradition that more serious metaphysical matters could be dealt with in a lighthearted fashion.[2] We can think of Apuleius and his *Golden Ass* which was an exposition of Platonist dogma. *Serio Ludere,* to play seriously, was the maxim of many of the Renaissance neoPlatonists and was actually part of the title of Achille Bocchi's emblem book of 1555, *Symbolicarum Questionum…quas serio ludebat.*[3] Cusanus' own book *De Ludo globi,* the Game of the Sphere, describes a game in which the player attempts to throw a misshapen ball or globe in a straight

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[1] *Facetia* 68 from the first English edition translated anonymously. Lisieux: Paris, 1879

[2] We can trace the origin of this to Plato in the *Republic* 545-7. See the excerpt quoted in Wind 236.

[3] A full discussion of emblems inspired by the *facetiae* is given in Manning Chapter 7.

line. This is of course an allegory of the paradoxes and contradictions to be found in the nature of God. The *facetiae* were also akin to the *fabliaux* a genre which is not however to be mistaken for the fable. The *fabliaux* were bawdy, often obscene, stories written in verse and dating from about the 8th to the 13th centuries. About one hundred sixty of them survive. They do however share the intent of the fable and pillory the stupid and unfortunate, a class which is usually represented by a cuckolded husband.

Returning to the fables, we can document other influential collections. Marie de France who has been described as the greatest woman writer of the Middle Ages[1] wrote a book of fables in the 12th Century which was very popular; some 23 manuscripts of the poems survive. Although some of her stories were derived from Aesop, no earlier source of the majority of them has been found so it may be assumed that she composed them herself. Then there was the so-called *Fables of Bidpai* which was derived from the Indian *Panchatantra* written in Sanskrit about the 4th century AD. Coming to Europe via Persian, Arabic, Greek and Latin translations they were rendered in several European vernacular languages in the 16th century. The first English version was by Sir Thomas North in 1570 and called the *Moral Philosophy of Doni* after the Italian author from whom it, in turn, was translated. La Fontaine acknowledged that he owed a number of his fables to Bidpai.

Figure 25 The pictura from the Tale of the two Robbers from *The Moral Philosophy of Doni*.

In the 15th Century fables were composed by contemporary writers such as Laurentius Abstemius and Filelfo whom we shall see as being obsessed by the number 100 but Aesop was by far the most popular and his fables became one of the first books to benefit from the printing press. They were translated by Lorenzo Valla and printed widely including an edition by Caxton in 1485 which he had translated himself and this printing also included his own translation of Poggio's *Facetiae*. There were many further editions of the Fables including that published in 1506 by

[1] Spiegel 3

the Aldine Press (the same year that Aldus published the *Hieroglyphica* of Horapollo; page 172) and those by Froben and Stephens. An advance in the study of fables came with the edition of Isaac Nevelet in 1610, the *Mythologica Aesopica,* which included stories from other authors. Such was the fascination with Aesop that there was even a maze in the gardens of the Chateau of Versailles, the palace of Louis XIV, in which were placed statues and inscriptions that illustrated the Fables. Aesop's *Fables* is generally regarded as the most widely circulated book of all time after the Bible[1] and no lesser an authority than Luther himself accorded them the same prestige as the Bible. "We will make a Zion…..and we will build there three tabernacles, one for the Psalms, one for the Prophets, and one for Aesop."[2]

According to Landwehr, some three hundred fable books, of which one hundred thirteen were of Aesop, were published in Holland alone during this period testifying to the popularity of the genre and the relationship between fable and emblem book was obviously very close. Corrozet brought out his emblem book *Hecatomgraphie* subtitled *contenans plusieurs appophthegmes proverbes, Sentences & dictz* in 1540 and this was followed in 1542 by his fable book, *Les fables d'Esope Phrygien,* Fables of Aesop the Phrygian, which was the archetype for much of the Dutch genre.[3] Many if not most of these were illustrated, they were formatted in the same way with one fable and illustration per page and they borrowed material from the emblem writers in addition to using the traditional sources.

In the late 17th Century, La Fontaine, the most celebrated of all original fable writers of the time, reached his literary prime although he came too late to influence the heyday of the symbolic literature. His output reminds us of the oeuvre of Phaedrus since he started by emulating Aesop and then expanded into a general satire of contemporary life and human folly.

The fable is obviously a naïve form of allegory with its emphasis on the activities of animals which are made to behave like human beings. The personification and caricature of animals enabled the less savory extremes of human character to be described in a summary and simplistic manner in turn emphasizing the moral of the story. Early fables also recounted tales of gods, men and inanimate objects of nature but fables can

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[1] A summary of Aesopian research can be found at http://www.mythfolklore.net/aesopica/index.htm (3/10/2004).

[2] Cited in Ziolkowski 24

[3] Van Vaeck in *Emblematica* 7, 1, 1993 25

be distinguished from allegory and parable by the combination of wit and morality which they employ.[1] They are essentially lighthearted, often merely jokes whose subtle references could be fully appreciated by the listeners of the time. Many of the fables in the form we now have them end with the moral of the story being summarized in a single sentence called the *epimythia* or afterword and these may very well have been added by later anthologists as a quick identifier for exercises in Rhetoric. These summaries were the origin of the commentaries which were added first to the emblems of Alciato with the French edition by Aneau of 1549 and then to subsequent editions with these texts themselves evolving into the essay form pioneered by Montaigne. Montaigne had a high opinion of the fables. In his opinion the allegorical interpretation of the fables was the most superficial and "there are others more living, more essential and internal."[2]

In any event, the similarity of the format of the fable to the emblem with its heading, its summary and brief story is obvious. Alciato used about twenty-five fables derived from Aesop in his emblems including as the Beetle and the Eagle and The Statue of a God on an Ass and so did many of the other emblem writers including Peacham and Whitney in his *Choice of Emblemes* although many used by the latter were copies of those in Alciato.[3]

The fable also has similarities to the parable. They are both stories which make a point; in the case of the fable it was a moral lesson to be learned and in the case of the parable a spiritual one. Quarles wrote in the introduction to his work, the *Hieroglyphiques of the Life of Man*, the famous phrase, "An emblem is but a silent parable." Parables were obviously suitable for the preacher and the pulpit and there were many collections of suitable stories composed for use by preachers. One was the *Alphabet of Tales* some 850 short but mostly excruciatingly boring stories which one can imagine were the highlights of interminably long medieval sermons. Here is an example.

> There was a good holy old man and for 40 years he never drank; and always he would take a vessel and fill it with wine and hang it in his chamber that he might see it every day. So eventually his brother asked him why he did so and he answered again and said, 'I do it for this intent, that when I see that

[1] Further details of the history of fables can be obtained from the entry by G.F.Townsend in Project Gutenberg http://www.gutenberg.net/index.shtml (3/10/2004).

[2] Montaigne *Essays* II, 10

[3] See Mason Tung *A Serial List of Aesopic Fables …Emblemata* 1989 4, 2, 315

thing that I desire, that with the abstinence thereof I may suffer more pain and so of almighty God I shall have more need.' [1]

A little more stimulating was the *Gesta Romanorum*, or Deeds of the Romans, a book possibly originating in England but surviving in many manuscripts from all over Europe with stories from classical times which was used as source material by many late medieval authors as well as by preachers. The stories follow a familiar pattern: a heading, the anecdote and a brief commentary or moralization. Finally in this genre, we can mention the *Book of the Knight of the Tour Landry* written by Geoffrey de la Tour Landry in 1371-2 as a handbook of instructional parables for his daughters which became very popular and was widely copied and translated. These stories have a surprising origin. Much of the *Gesta Romanorum* were derived from the *Moralitates Historiarum* of Robert Holcot who died in 1349. This was a series of stories describing abstract phenomena by way of a striking metaphor and Holcot was in turn influenced by the *Fulgentius Metaforalis* of his older contemporary John Ridevall. In spite of the fact that Ridevall and Holcot were Dominican priors and preachers and the stories were intended for religious audiences, Ridevall's source and inspiration was one of several contemporary adaptations of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, the Art of Love![2]

Another source of parables in the late Renaissance was Caussin's *Polyhistor Symbolicus* of 1618 which contained more than one thousand examples. Caussin also published a version of Horapollo and this book the *De Symbolica Aegyptiorum Sapienta* On the Wisdom of the Egyptians, of 1618 also contained a number of enigmas yet another popular genre. Caussin was one of the first to cast doubts on the authenticity of the Horapollo (page 172) and in his commentary, he notes that some of the text has relationships to Latin words which would of course have been impossible if the original was indeed a translation direct from the Egyptian.

· Proverbs ·

Fables and proverbs were specific elements in the art of Rhetoric and in the fourteen part *Progymnasmata,* the standard group of set exercises employed in the instruction of Rhetoric in which the stories were to be used

[1] Tale 22 adapted from an 15th Century translation of the Latin version by Etienne de Besançon in a manuscript in the British Museum (MS 25,719).
[2] For a further discussion see Smalley 1960

as illustrations in the practice of composition. Like fables, proverbs have had a wide and ancient history. Many countries in the world have a tradition of proverbs and they go back far into the origins of literary history, back at least to the civilizations of Sumeria and Babylonia in the second millennium BC. In the West, the status of the genre is confirmed by the incorporation of the *Book of Proverbs* in the canon of the Old Testament. Parts of the biblical Proverbs go back as far as 900 BC and are supposedly derived from the *Instruction of Amenemope*, the work of an Egyptian pharaoh written for his son as a set of moral instructions.[1] Origen recognized the essentially metaphorical or allegorical function of the proverb in his commentary on the Old Testament *Song of Songs*, "The word proverb denotes that one thing is openly said and another is inwardly meant."[2]

Another father writing for his son was Cato with his *Moral Distichs*, a compilation of brief two line instructions advocating the virtuous life which survived the Middle Ages and became a standard and extremely popular text book[3] in Renaissance and later times. Cato's *Distichs* is also known as the first book of the Latin classics of which a translation was printed in the United States. Benjamin Franklin printed an anonymous translation in 1735.[4] Here is an example of a Distich from Book II, 19, in another translation by Wayland Johnson Chase.

> No spendthrift be, nor gain a miser's name;
> For either fault is sure to hurt thy fame.

By the end of the Middle Ages, the use of proverbs in literature had reached bizarre heights; there were poems which consisted entirely of proverbs[5] and in some cases the proverbs were composed by the author. The second half of the 15th Century saw the development of a different genre: books of illustrated proverbs. At least thirty of them have survived and some specialize in a single subject as did many of the emblem books to which they had an obvious relationship. Proverb books were a step from the style of the *Othea* by Pisan which I referred to above since they included only the moral and not the spiritual interpretation of the proverb which she called the allegorie.

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[1] This derived from a personal communication from Professor David Bankier.

[2] Cited Fletcher 329

[3] The *Anthology* of Stobaeus (page 142 above) was also written for the edification of his son.

[4] It is known that Benjamin Franklin had a keen interest in emblems. He owned several emblem books and used emblematic images to make designs for flags and for paper money.

[5] Huizinga 274 quotes the names of half a dozen of these.

An example of these is the proverb book *Proverbes en Rime* from about 1490 on each page of which is a picture with a short explanatory poem.[1] One example illustrates the proverb "All that glisters is not gold." As Russell makes clear, this is an excellent example of the subtlety that the proverb and emblem writers were aiming at. What the picture is intended to depict and what is the relationship of the picture to the proverb is not immediately obvious. A full and careful reading of the text is required to clarify the matter. Here, the writer points to apparent success of the household, the full table, the well dressed wife and draws the moral that success is only fleeting and fragile. This again mimics the well-turned emblem where ambiguity or uncertainty between the different elements of the composition could only be resolved by careful study or knowledge of the history or symbolic origins of the subject matter.

Figure 26 'Not everything that shines is gold' Quarles' emblem 29 from the 1729 edition of his *Emblems Moral and Divine.*

The same proverb is used by Quarles in his *Emblemes*.[2] Here, his title is from the Book of Proverbs (23, 5) and he explains in the first verse of his poem.

False world thou liest, thou cannot lend the least delight
Thy favors cannot gain a friend, they are so slight
Thy morning pleasures make an end to please at night
Poor are the wants that thou supplies
And yet thou vaunts, and yet thou viest
With heaven. Fond earth thou boast, false world thou liest.

Other manuscript compositions of this time included those by Pierre Sala (c1457-1529) who wrote a book of *Enigmas* which contained 12 emblem-like entries consisting of an illustration and a brief four line poem of which the last line usually consisted of a proverb. The enigma was another recognized literary genre of the age, this time a brief literary puzzle whose meaning was to be teased out with great difficulty or erudition. Estienne, not very helpfully, defines the enigma as "an obscure sen-

[1] Described in D. Russell 1995 60
[2] Francis Quarles *Emblems Divine and Moral* 1723, 80. The first Edition is dated 1635.

tence, expressed by an occult similitude ….a very obscure allegory."[1] There were and still are published collections of enigmas and the genre was sufficiently stereotyped that Mignault who wrote the extensive commentary on Alciato first published in 1571 felt the necessity to assure his readers that Alciato's Emblems were not enigmas.[2] This was especially necessary since several emblem writers such as De Montenay and Junius added collections of enigmas to their emblem books. A collection of one hundred enigmas is also contained in Nicholas Caussin's *De Symbolica Aegyptorum Sapienta,* On the Symbolic Wisdom of the Egyptians, first published in 1618. Here is an enigma from Junius with the Latin original, for you to figure out.

> Nomine sum vini digna, vicem tamen huius
> Impleo, dum cerebri victrix percelle cavernas
> Illud sol radians, me Mulciber excoquit omne
> Gignor, alitque Ceres madefacti farris acervis.

> I am worthy of the name of wine, and do the same sort of job.
> As conqueror of Cerberus, I send flashes through his caves,
> Radiating as the sun, I am born as Vulcan hardens me whole
> And Ceres feeds me with heaps of softened flour.[3]

Returning to the work of Pierre Sala, we should note two other similar books of illustrated animal fables which he wrote of which one, the *Fables et emblemes en vers*[4]*,* or Fables and Emblems in verse, I have already referred to. In this latter work, most of the poems are summarized by a commonplace proverb[5]. It is known that Sala used versions of the Fables of Romulus, the medieval version of Aesop as inspiration.[6] Yet another book of this type of particular interest is the *Dictz moraulx pur faire tapisserie*, or Moral Sayings with which to make tapestry, by Henri Baude probably from the last quarter of the 15th Century. Again it combined the picture with a moral poem and in some cases the different elements of the ensemble gave different glosses on the proverb. Here we have a direct reference to Alciato's own apparently limited purpose in his own Little Book of Emblems which as we shall see was originally intended as a handbook for the use of decorators and craftsmen.

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[1] Estienne 1645 trans. Blount 1646
[2] Alciato *Emblemata* 1577 42
[3] Junius 1565 Enigma ix trans. Nigel Harvie
[4] The word emblemes in this title was added by a later editor so unfortunately it gives no further clue as to the origin of the Emblem genre.
[5] D. Russell 65
[6] E. Burin *Emblematica* 3, 1, 1988 14

There is no doubt that the greatest of the collections of proverbs from this time was the *Adages* of Erasmus, first published in 1500. It was this book that first earned Erasmus the great reputation which he enjoyed throughout his lifetime, although its importance in the eyes of later critics was superseded by his translation of the New Testament and his *In Praise of Folly*. In the first edition of the *Adages*, there were 818 proverbs which were unnumbered but in subsequent editions, for instance in the second of 1508 published by Aldus, they were divided into 100's or centons and 1,000's or chiliades. This famous book went through twenty-seven editions in Erasmus lifetime and the final edition had 4251 proverbs and included many if not most of those known today in the West. Each proverb had at least a short commentary and many had whole essays, discussing their origin and their relevance to contemporary life. Among Erasmus' *Adages* were many of the *Symbola* of Pythagoras[1], the name given to the collection of the latter's sayings which had come down to the Renaissance and were believed to be the precepts of the great philosopher for his immediate disciples.

Erasmus wrote in his Introduction that the proverb always contains an enigma or mystery and points some allegorical or figurative meaning. He quotes Diomedes: "a proverb is the taking over of a popular saying, fitted to things and times, when words say one thing and mean another."[2] According to Mann Phillips[3], the *Adages*, "give a panorama of the ancient world" and as his book was enlarged and became more popular, Erasmus used it as a vehicle for his own views on society. With the *Adages*, Erasmus "earned the gratitude of posterity by supplying his successors with a systematic collection of anecdotes and sentences ready for use, the real quotation book of the early modern period that everybody used but few cared to mention." [4] Alciato considered himself acquainted with Erasmus, he corresponded with him and at least three of Alciato's emblems were specifically based on entries in the Adages. I say specifically because the *Adages* ranges over the totality of classical and Christian literature and myth and it is possible to find some reference in Erasmus to almost any motif that was used by the emblem writers.

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[1] Another even larger collection of the *Symbola* was made by Ficino in *Symbole Pythagore* of 1497.

[2] Translated by Massing in *Erasmian Wit* 22. This was Diomedes the grammarian and not the Diomedes who figures prominently in the Iliad.

[3]Mann Phillips 1964

[4]Kristeller 202

The Frenchman la Perrière used the *Adages* extensively in *Le Theatre de Bons Engins,* the first French Emblem book and similarly Corrozet in his *Hecatomgraphie* used proverbs as titles as did Pierre Coustau in his *Pegma*[1] where he illustrates the proverb 'haste makes waste' with Plutarch's story of Sertorius from his *Lives.* Sertorius was a Roman general who wished to emphasize to his subordinates that careful planning and forethought were preferable to brute strength. He proved his point by getting a strong man to try and pull out the tail of a horse! When this failed, he ordered a weaker man to pull out the tail hair by hair and this succeeded. This story was very popular in the Renaissance and was referred to on numerous occasions.[2] Jakob Cats the Dutch Emblematist also used proverbs as the inspiration for his Emblems and there were many other collections during the time included the *Motz Dorez* of Pierre Grosnet, named for the compiler and sometime author of these riddles, ballads, distichs and proverbs many of them bawdy or lighthearted and including some of the first poems printed in vernacular French which went through some fifteen editions.

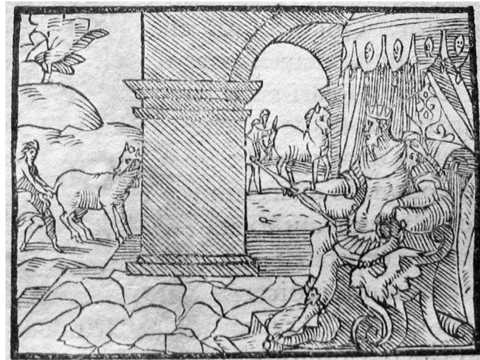

Figure 27 Haste make waste. The story of Sertorius from the *Pegma* of Pierre Coustau.

The first English collection of proverbs was by John Heywood in 1546 and this contained many examples we would recognize today. The story goes that when Heywood presented his collection to Queen Elizabeth, he boasted that it contained all the proverbs then known in English but she immediately, to his great discomfort, quoted one which was not in his book. There was even an anonymous Scottish collection published in Aberdeen in 1622 and copied from Erasmus entitled *Adagia in Latine and English contayning five hundreth proverbes.* Finally, we can mention the German emblem book, *Dreistandige Sinnbilder*, Triple Emblems by Franz Knesebeck published in 1643 which was written in conjunction with the language theorist Schotellius to promote the latter's theory about the ancient origin of proverbs and their importance as an indication of the natural relationship of words to the things they signified.

[1]Coustau 1559 302

[2] See also the illustration given in Massing 163

· Hieroglyphs ·

The hieroglyphic script of the Egyptians held an enormous fascination for the humanists. We know now that hieroglyphs are partly iconic, that is some of them look like, wholly or partly, what they represent; these are called ideograms, they represent the idea of the object. The remaining hieroglyphs are simple phonograms, they are letters, or syllables. These distinctions were completely lost on Renaissance scholars. To many of them, the Egyptian language was thought to be the original Adamic language from the time before the fall of man, an idea that was fostered by the remark in Genesis that Adam gave all creatures their name;[1] if this had been the case, then Adam must have spoken the first language.

The project of recreating such a language was an obsession which the Renaissance humanists and their successors refused to abandon. The idea was expounded by Leon Battista Alberti in his *De Architectura* of 1452 where he proposed that hieroglyphs were the lost universal language and we shall see how Geoffrey Tory's famous book, the *Champ Fleury* described the symbolic origins of letters. Francis Bacon in the 17th Century suggested that the universal language was to be found in 'real characters', characters or signs which like hieroglyphics were more than just the concepts which they expressed, they were in some sense the concepts themselves, an identity which is perhaps characteristic of all primitive languages. As Frye puts it, in such language "there is relatively little emphasis on a clear separation of subject and object: the emphasis falls rather on the feeling that subject and object are linked by a common power or energy."[2]

Bacon was followed later in the 17th century by Leibniz who taking his inspiration from Ramon Llull also expressed the need for universal *caracteristica* a word which had always had overtones of magical significance. It was Leibniz' determination to investigate new and universal ways of expressing the symbolism of language that led to his invention of calculus although in his own view the symbols and expressions of the calculus were just part of the new universal language.

It was further believed by many during the Renaissance and later that the philosophy of Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle must have been inspired by the Egyptians and that hieroglyphs were the archetype of the Platonic symbols and were the sensible or physical representations of the

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[1]*Genesis* 2, 19
[2] Frye 1981 6

divine world of ideas (the *logoi*) which was the highest form of reality. This paralleled the idea of the Egyptians themselves that the name of an object contained its whole reality and thus by extension that knowledge of the name of the object gives power over that object. The name depicted in the hieroglyph was a symbol of the divine reality of the object itself.[1] Plotinus himself said describing hieroglyphs: "each manifestation of knowledge and wisdom is a distinct image, an object in itself, an immediate unity and not an aggregate of discursive reasoning…"[2] Certainly the neoPlatonists, Ficino and Pico took this view. Ficino was convinced that the divine ideas of things were conveyed directly in hieroglyphs. "That will be the golden age when all words - figure words - myths and all figures - language figures - will be hieroglyphs."

This enthusiasm which was shared by many humanists reflected their desire to make use of all this new material to assist in their intense and ongoing quest to seek the meaning of life and the nature of God. This was a quest typified by the emblem phenomenon itself which not merely made use of the motifs of Horapollo but also employed the symbolic mode to attempt to express the mysteries of theology and metaphysics. We shall see that Alciato acknowledges that the hieroglyphics of Horapollo were one of the inspirations for his book of emblems and I take the view that his use of the Latin word *argumenti* in that context refers to the common symbolic mode of expression of both hieroglyph and emblem rather than the more restricted meaning of motif.[3]

Some humanists including Leon Battista Alberti took the more pragmatic view that the form of the hieroglyphs were somehow related to the ideas they represented and in this they were supported by a reading of the famous sourcebook for hieroglyphs in the Renaissance: the two books of the *Hieroglyphica* of Horapollo, discovered in 1417, first published by Aldus in 1505 and translated into Latin in 1517 by Filippo Fasanini[4] who incidentally was also a teacher of Alciato. Written probably in the 5th Century AD by Greek speaking Egyptians, the *Hieroglyphica* was said to have been translated from the Egyptian by one Philippus but the two sections may have been written by different authors. The whole con-

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[1] See Fowden 64 for a further discussion.

[2] Plotinus *Enneads* V, 8, 6, 417

[3] "Words signify, ideas are signified. Although at times things likewise signify, as for example the hieroglyphs in the writings of Horus and Chaeremon, a motif [*argumenti*] we have also used in a book of poetry titled Emblemata." See page 224 for the context and a discussion of this quotation.

[4] Fasanini in the introduction to his translation of the Horapollo refers to the usefulness of the hieroglyph for decorative purposes.

sists of an exegesis of the meaning of a number of Egyptian hieroglyphs although most of the descriptions are generally regarded as fictitious. It appears that by the time of Horapollo, such was the decline of Egyptian civilization under Roman and Greek influence, there remained no one who could accurately read the hieroglyphs although contrary to general opinion Iversen believes that "almost all of the allegorical expoundings can more or less directly be traced back either to actual hieroglyphical meaning of the signs or be explained from one of their specific employments as graphic signs."[1]

The only ancient writer who came near to the truth was Clement of Alexandria who not only accurately described the different modes of Egyptian writing but had good guesses at the meanings of some of the hieroglyphs. He said

> Now those instructed amongst the Egyptians first learned that form of Egyptian letters which they called Epistolographic; second the Hieratic practiced by sacred scribes; and lastly, the Hieroglyphic, of which one kind is literal by the first elements and the other symbolic.[2]

Nevertheless despite this ignorance of their real meaning, hieroglyphs were of enormous fascination to the humanists whose respect for and interest in Egyptian culture was enhanced by the fact that so much of the cultural heritage of late classical times derived from Alexandria. The Horapollo was so popular that there were at least 30 editions, translations and reprints during the 16th Century and at least one of these, the first French translation published in 1543, by Kerver was laid out like an emblem book and is usually categorized as such. Almost the only Renaissance author who glimpsed the truth about the book was Abraham Fraunce who complained that

> these hieroglyphs from Horus which have come down to us do not seem to be to be so elevated and recondite that they cannot be understood by the least of those who have the slightest acquaintance with the Muses. I am inclined to believe therefore that those high mysteries of the Egyptians have perished through the ravages of time…[3]

One of the hieroglyphs of Horapollo was the stork which appears in both parts of his book and thus is one reason for the suggestion that the two were written by different authors. In Book 1 it is stated that the stork

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[1] Iversen 48 cited in Daly 1998 20

[2] Clement *Stromateis* IV translated and cited Allen 110

[3] Abraham Fraunce *Insignium, Armorum, Emblematum….1588* trans. Denis L. Drysdall

> Alone of the irrational animals, when it has been reared by its progenitors, it returns thanks to them in its old age. For in the place where they have been reared by them, they make them a nest and plume them and seek food for them, until their parents have grown feathers again and are able to fend for themselves. Whence too the scepter of the Gods has a stork for its chief adornment.[1]

Alciato and many of the other emblem writers used this story to illustrate piety, filial devotion or other motifs. Perhaps the best known of all Horapollo's hieroglyphs was that of the serpent swallowing his tail. Horapollo translates this as the universe but almost all Renaissance writers treat it as meaning eternity, which Horapollo had symbolized by the sun and the moon, these last according to him being the eternal elements. The image however had long been known in antiquity. At the conclusion of Meleager's collection of epigrams called the Garland, which I have already described (page 142), he says that his garland will endure for ever "and I, curved round like a snake's back, am placed at the end of this pleasant work."[2] The same symbol was the motif on a famous medal of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco which was possibly designed by Botticelli[3] and many of the emblem writers including Alciato[4] and Coustau in his *Pegma*[5] employed it. It is an especially interesting symbol for Alciato scholars since his emblem of Eternity is derived from his own collection of epigrams which he had copied from classical statuary in Rome and Milan. This particular one was on the monument to Aureolus the tyrant in Rome and thus shows that

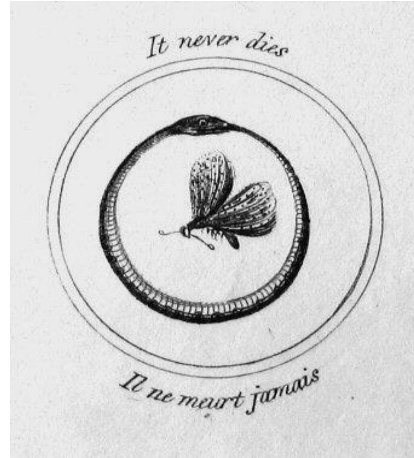

Figure 28 The Ourobouros symbolizing eternity with the butterfly (the soul) unable to escape. From *Knights Modern and Antique Gems* of 1828.

[1] Horapollo *Hieroglyphica* I, 55 and II, 58 trans. Boas. The introduction to his translation is an excellent brief summary of the whole field.
[2] Trans. Richard Aldington
[3] Gombrich 66
[4] Emblem 42 in the 1534 edition and 133 in later editions. The original edition of 1531 only has a Triton blowing a conch to illustrate eternity – this may have been because the publisher lacked the appropriate picture and in later editions both the serpent and the Triton are shown.
[5] Coustau *Pegma* 1559 255

the Roman public must have been to some extent familiar with the Egyptian hieroglyphs.

In the Renaissance, this motif became the received symbol for eternity[1] and it was still being used as such for decorative purposes in the 19th Century. It appears, for instance, in *Knights Modern and Antique Gems* of 1828 under the motto 'It never dies'. This book consisted of a series of plates showing small devices intended as a guide to seal engravers as well as other artists. It is often classified as an emblem book and the second edition was called *Knights Gems and Devices.* The butterfly in this device was used in the Renaissance as a symbol of the soul and here it also demonstrates eternity.

Another of Horapollo's hieroglyphs was the Swan (II, 39) which is said to illustrate a musical old man since the Swan sings most sweetly when it is old. This motif was also a favorite one of the emblem writers since the swan had always been the symbol of the poet himself. Alciato used it[2] and he was copied by Whitney[3] among others. The swan was the sacred bird of Apollo, God of poetry, and the origin of the myth is related in Book II of the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid in which Cygnus, King of Liguria, is transformed into a swan. Horace relates in one of his Odes how he himself is metamorphosed into a swan and thus he and his poetry will be certain to fly over many countries.[4] Latin had the same word, *carmen,* for both poem and song and the traditional characteristic of the swan engendered much discussion amongst literary theorists over the centuries on the question whether poets wrote most sweetly in their youth or in their old age. According to Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo* the swan sings sweetly in old age because it has a prophetic vision of the blessings of the next world[5] and later, both Ripa and Valeriano in their books on allegory, authenticated the idea for the late Renaissance. Alciato in the quotation given above describing the sources and rationale of his own emblem book also refers to the *Hieroglyphs* of Chaeremon who was a historian living in Alexandria in the first Century AD and tutor of the Emperor Nero. There are several references in the Renaissance to Chae-

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[1] See Panofsky 169 et seq for a discussion of how the theory of the circular or cyclical progress of time raised difficulties with prevailing Renaissance theological and aesthetic theories that man and his art represented the apex of development of the human condition.

[2] Alciato Emblem 183

[3] Whitney 1586 126

[4] Horace *Odes* 2, 20

[5] Plato *Phaedo* 85b

remon's book on hieroglyphs but only fragments of the work appear to have survived.[1]

Prefiguring the didactic purpose of the emblems, Plutarch in his *De Isis and Osiris* also refers to hieroglyphs as having the same moral authority as the symbola of Pythagoras.[2] But most of Horapollo's hieroglyphs have little spiritual or metaphysical basis; the descriptions of animal hieroglyphs in particular were in fact taken from Aelian who wrote in the 3rd Century AD and from other classical descriptions of animals especially those by Aristotle and Pliny. But the humanists, who were not to know of the derivative nature of these translations or indeed that they were nearly all erroneous, regarded them with a religious reverence. Francesco Colonna in his fantasy, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* or Poliphilo's struggles of love in a Dream, published by Aldus in 1499 contained pictures of hieroglyphic inscriptions with rather facile translations although it has been shown that the majority of these derive in the first instance from the remains of friezes on classical temples which could be still be seen in Rome rather than from the Horapollo or any other literary source.[3]

Figure 29 The personification of Poetry from George Richardson's 1779 English version of Ripa's *Iconologia*. Note the swan in the background.

[1] See van der Horst 1984 cited in Boas xx Note 4
[2] Plutarch *Moralia: On Isis and Osiris* 354, F
[3] See for a full discussion Brian A. Curran in *Word and Image* 14 1/2 1998 156

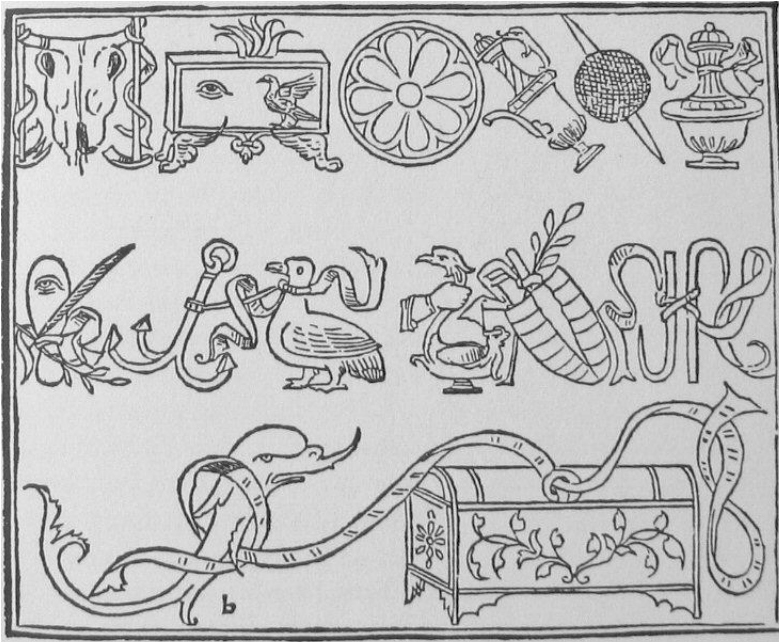

Figure 30 The hieroglyphic message in Colonna's *Hynerotomachia Poliphili* of 1499.

Another great work on hieroglyphs from the Renaissance was the treatise by Pierio Valeriano also called *Hieroglyphica* which was published in 1556 but had been written earlier probably before 1527, the year in which Rome had been sacked. It was formally intended as a commentary on and enlargement of the Horapollo but Valeriano extended his commentary to cover other ancient symbols. His thesis that Christian revelation was merely one more in the line in divine wisdom revealed by the hieroglyphs and Platonism was very much in the tradition of the Renaissance Platonists who put as much faith in the pagan prophets such as the sibyls as the Old Testament prophets. It was no coincidence that Michelangelo had depicted both Old Testament prophets and the sibyls on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

Valeriano's original inspiration for his work may have been the so-called Bembine table, a brass altar piece or table deriving from the 2nd Century AD which was in the possession of Cardinal Bembo, an early patron of Valeriano. The table was inlaid with silver and enamel and carved with numerous hieroglyphs. The piece was stolen during the sack of Rome in 1527 but eventually recovered and is still extant in a museum in Turin.

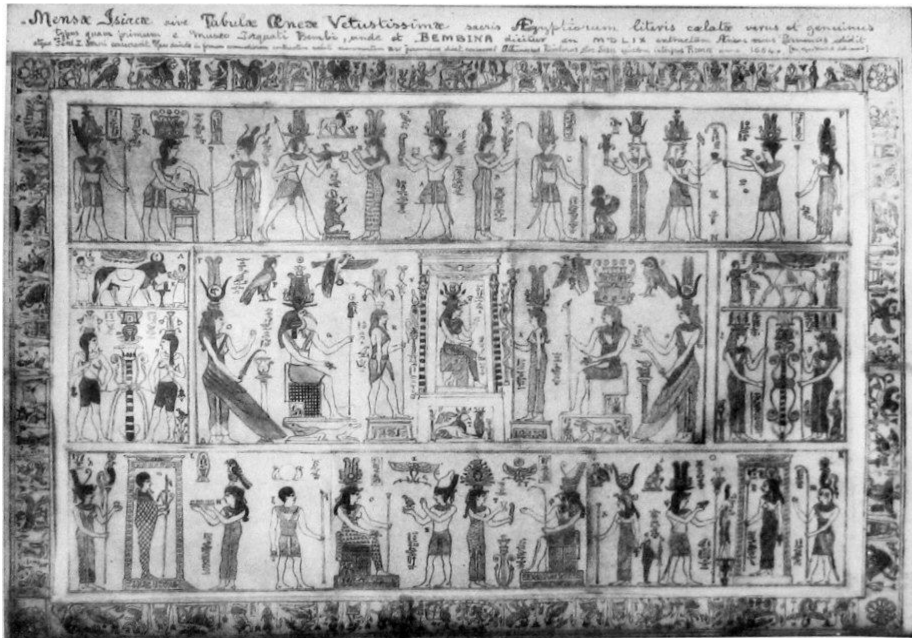

Figure 31 The Bembine Table

So insistent was Valeriano in his neoPlatonist interpretation that sometimes his imagination like that of Horapollo gets the better of him but the breadth of his knowledge and reference is remarkable. He cites a total of 435 authorities. His book was very popular; there were at least thirty later editions often with further commentary by others and it was influential on the European literary and decorative culture of the next two centuries. He took a less reductionist view of his subject than many of his contemporaries. He wrote that "hieroglyphics include emblems, symbols, insignia, which although they differ in name are seen to be similar in many ways."[1]

One emblem writer, Baruch Romaelius, took him at his word and lifted sixteen sections from the *Hieroglyphica,* added pictures and epigrams in both Latin and German and he had an emblem book. Thomas Palmer with his *Two Hundred Poosees* of 1566, the first English emblem book, did the same; amongst his emblems were extracts from Valeriano which he had translated and turned into verse.

There were other compilations of hieroglyphs based on Horapollo such as Caussin's *De Symbolica Aegyptiorum Sapienta*, On the Symbols of

[1] *Hieroglyphica* 1631 trans. B.Westerweel *Emblematica* 6, 1, 1992 54

the Wisdom of the Egyptians, published in 1618 and *Theologia Symbolica* by Sandaeus of 1626. Sometimes these two books were published together. They reflected the increasing Renaissance passion for theological eclecticism and contained material from many sources including Christian iconology demonstrating that the hieroglyph was rapidly evolving into a synonym of allegory. The language of the hieroglyph was again seen as a manifestation of the divine language which could reveal the nature of God.

The acknowledged master in the 17th Century of egyptology, of the hieroglyphs and of their interpretation was Athanasius Kircher. His several books on aspects of Egyptian culture and language were crowned by his masterpiece, the *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* published in 1652, a vast tome of 2,000 folio pages in which the hieroglyphs are once again given a divine interpretation and Hermes Trismegistus is deemed to have been their inventor.[1] Needless to say Kircher was completely and ludicrously incorrect in most of his interpretations. Here is an example given by Allen which describes a hieroglyphic inscription on an obelisk which has now been translated to say that the Emperor Domitian ordered the obelisk and had the inscription cut in Rome. Kircher, however, reads the inscription as follows: "the four powered beneficial guardian of celestial generation, dominator of air, through Mophta commits benign aerial humor to Ammon, most powerful of inferiors, so that by images and fitting ceremonies it is potently expressed."[2] As a result of the accuracy of his transliteration of the hieroglyphic script, Kircher was able to write in his book a complete history of Egypt, a history which was popular and influential for a century to come!

· The Physiologus and the Bestiaries ·

The *Physiologus*, which is usually translated as 'the Naturalist', was one of the most widely circulated books of the Middle Ages. Originating as a Greek text in Alexandria about the 2nd Century AD, the anonymous author drew on the descriptions of animals by Aristotle[3] and Pliny and deduced a moral from each description At least some of the allegorical interpretations were identical with the descriptions from the Horapollo so one of the two was derived at least partially from the other or they

[1] Yates 1991 417
[2] Allen 127
[3] Aristotle in his *De animalibus* had described about 550 animals.

both were derived from an earlier source. The Physiologus was translated into almost every language in the Western world, from Ethiopian to Icelandic[1] and, eventually, it was adopted by the Church as a convenient vehicle for the propagation of Christian morality. Over the centuries, the standard format of the Physiologus expanded from just forty-nine entries to over one hundred and material from the works of other authors was added including the *Hexaemera* of St. Basil and St. Ambrose and the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville (d. 636). Many of the animals described such as the Unicorn, the Phoenix, the Centaur, the Siren and the Antlion were later understood to be fictitious but this did not deter the editors at the time. St. Augustine had something to say on this as indeed he did on almost every theological topic we have touched; according to him it did not matter whether certain animals existed, what mattered is what they signified.

> Moreover, if for the administration of the sacraments, certain symbolisms are drawn, not only from the heavens and stars, but also from all the lower creation, the intention is to provide the doctrine of Salvation with a sort of eloquence, adapted to raise the affections of those to whom it is presented from the visible to the invisible, from the corporeal to the spiritual, from the spiritual to the eternal.[2]

The Physiologus was one of the most widely circulated books of the age but, eventually, it gave way to the Bestiary which by the 12th Century also became extraordinarily popular particularly in England. Obviously based on the Physiologus since the very name derived from the opening line of the former, the '*Bestiarum Vocabulum*', the Bestiary can be distinguished by the expansion of the number of animals treated, the addition of images and the change in the nature of the message that was to be learnt. This reflected the trend which we have already commented on. Interpretations of the literary symbol were evolving from mystical or ontological concepts to practical or ethical exhortations many or most of which in the case of the Bestiary were wrapped in scriptural messages. Here is an extract from White's *Bestiary* describing the Lion,

> The Lion's second feature is, that when he sleeps, he seems to keep his eyes open. In this very way, Our Lord also, while sleeping in the body, was buried after being crucified - yet his Godhead was awake. As it is said in the

[1] The last handwritten copy of the *Physiologus* known dates from 1724 and is in Icelandic. White 232

[2] Augustine *Epistolae* Migne XXXIII, 210 trans. and cited Allen 113

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Song of Songs, 'I am asleep and my heart is awake' or, in the Psalm, 'Behold he who keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep'.[1]

Thus, in the Bestiary, we have once again a familiar format: the message, the image and the moral. The allegorical place of the lion in the Scriptures is however typical of the ambiguities of typological interpretation. It could be taken to mean the exact opposite of the allegory from the Bestiary since in the Psalms the phrase 'save me from the mouth of the lion'[2] has been viewed as an allegory of hell. Elsewhere the lion has been assumed to be a symbol of the devil because of its lust and alternatively a symbol of the honest Christian because of its strength.

Figure 32 An illustration from a 12th century Bestiary showing three different characteristics of the lion.

The medieval philosophical attitude towards animals was ambivalent. On the one hand there was the common sense theory of St. Augustine that man "excels the beast in the dignity of a rational soul"[3] and on the other a natural populist view which endowed the animal with rational and moral powers equal or superior to man. Man was believed to be morally defective, as a result of the Fall from grace in the garden of Eden and

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[1] *The Book of Beasts* Cape 1954 a 12th Century Bestiary trans. and ed. by T.H. White which is, according to the editor, the first full English translation of any Bestiary.

[2] *Psalm* 22, 21

[3] Augustine *De doctrina christina* 1, 22, 20, 5-8 cited Ziolkowski 33

thus naturally endowed with original sin but animals were not subject to the same stigma. This thought is expressed by John Bunyan in his emblem *The Sinner and The Spider* from his *Divine Emblems*. The *subscriptio* to this emblem is a long dialogue between a man and a spider which argues the moral merits of each of them and includes these lines expressed by the Spider:

> Poor Man! I keep the rules of my creation.
> Thy sin has cast thee from thy station.[1]

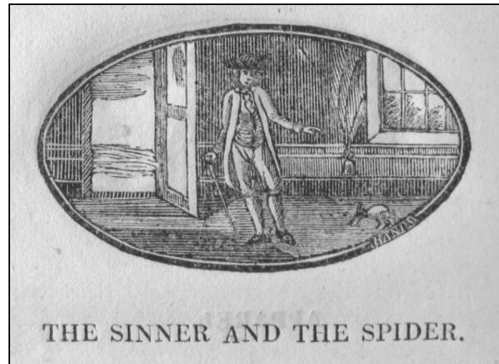

Figure 33 The sinner and the spider. An emblem from John Bunyan's *A Book for Boys and Girls*.

Since all the natural world was a representation of God himself, who was good, and the animals were part of that representation, animals must also be morally good. The downside of this responsibility was that animals were also deemed accountable for their actions and could be and were punished for their crimes. This was a thesis which was proposed for instance in the *Theologia Naturalis sive Liber Creaturarum* Natural Theology or the Book of Creatures, by the Spanish writer and theologian Raimond Sebond.This book is of particular interest because Montaigne as a young man made a translation of it for his father who could not read Latin and this sparked the younger Montaigne's interest in Sebond's claim that unaided human reason could comprehend the universe and establish the existence and nature of God. A defence of Sebond's position subsequently became the centerpiece of his *Essays*[2] although by the end of the piece, Montagine in fact subtly rejects Sebond and argues for the primacy of faith. He discusses many of the themes we have reviewed and, in sum,

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[1] John Bunyan *Divine Emblems* 1806 36
[2] Montaigne *Essays* II, 12, 318

"the world is but a perennial movement"[1] and nothing can be known for certain without the aid of divine grace.

Figure 34 The lion befriends the elephant. From Gerard Leeu's *Dialogus Creaturum*.

By the 14th Century, the Bestiary format had broadened and such books as the *Dialogus Creaturarum* and the *Liber Creaturarum* combined both material from the bestiaries and from fables. The former, first printed by Gerard Leeu of Gouda in 1480 in both Latin and Dutch was particularly popular. It contained 122 'fables' and there were at least 13 editions before 1500 and it has been described as one of the three great fable books of the 15th Century along with Aesop and the Fables of Bidpai.

Another step in the direction of the emblem was *Les Contes Moralisés* by Nicholas Bozon where descriptions and pictures were combined with a moral theme which was often different from the one attached to the same animal in a bestiary. As we shall see one of the attractions of the emblem was the enigmatic nature of the combination of elements of the emblem triad. [2] Also, a new genre had developed called the beast fable or beast epic of which one of the most celebrated was the *Roman de Renart* from the 12th Century, a series of satirical tales which inspired one of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The beast epic did not falter in popularity and versions were written by many later authors including Spenser[3] and Dryden.[4]

The Bestiary had a revival during the 16th century. An example was the *Decades de la description …des animaulx* of 1549 by Aneau and Gueroult

[1] Montaigne *Essays* III, 2, 610
[2] D. Russell 31
[3] *Mother Hubberd's Tale* 1591
[4] *The Hind and the Panther* 1687

both of whom also wrote emblem books. But by this time the *Physiologus* was almost forgotten. It was described by Gesner in the list of sources for his *Historia Animalium*, the History of Animals, as by an 'author obscurus'[1] although examples of it were still in circulation.[2] Caussin included the Physiologus of St. Epiphanius in his commentary on the hiehieroglyphs, *De Symbolica Aegyptorum Sapienta* or On the Symbolic Wisdom of the Egyptians of 1618 although his commentary was confined to just one of the animals described and by this time there were other classical sources of animal symbolism for the Renaissance scholar. One of the chief examples of these was from Plutarch's *Moralia*, the *De solertia animalium*, On the cleverness of animals, which itself was inspired partly by Aristotle's *De animalibus*. Fully in the allegorical tradition, Plutarch refers both to the physical characteristics of animals as well as their moral meanings as did Gesner. Although the latter's vast tome of some 3,500 pages published from 1551-1587 is usually reckoned to be the first modern work of zoology, nevertheless, as with Camerarius' book described below, each of Gesner's descriptions is prefaced with an emblematic interpretation of the animal he was investigating. Not the least of the attractions of Gesner's book is that Dürer did some of the illustrations including his famous woodcut of a rhino. Gesner, a prolific Swiss scholar, made the first Latin translation of the second half of the *Sentences* of Stobaeus the significance of which I reviewed above and, as we have seen, is also credited with being the father of modern palaeontology as a result of his *De omni rerum fossilium genere*, Of all kinds of fossils, of 1565.

Interestingly, Gesner gave some of his collection of natural history items to Joachim Camerarius a well-known collector and the latter used these as the basis for his book, *Symbolorum & Emblematum Centuria*, a Century of Symbols and Emblems. This was actually a book of devices and Camerarius used the word symbol, device and emblem interchangeably. The first edition of his emblem book was published about 1590 but new editions were published shortly thereafter and the final version had 400 devices incorporated into 4 volumes one each for animals, birds, insects and aquatics and reptiles.

[1] T.H.White 264

[2] Boas points out that even Leonardo trifled with the allegorical nature of the bestiaries as depicted in his notebooks. MacCurdy 469 cited in Boas 38

Figure 35 The *pictura* of emblem 31 from Camerarius' *Symbolorum & Emblematum Centuria* illustrating the parable of the horses in Plato's *Phaedrus*.

The book is a wonderful combination of the symbolic and the scientific, each device having five layers of commentary: the origin of the name, the characteristics of the animal derived largely from Gesner, the moral interpretations derived from many of the classical and medieval sources we have already reviewed, practical uses for each animal or its derivatives and finally references to other emblem books and sources which Camerarius had made use of.[1] Camerarius was a medical doctor and he had already made his name by editing a vast herbal or a book of the herbs used in medical practice.[2] In his emblem book perhaps more than any other, we are at the cusp of the transition between the age of symbolism and the age of the natural sciences.

· Lapidaries, Coins, Medals ·

Obviously, coins and medals are not books but many Renaissance books were written describing them and most categorizations of literary genres, some of which we have already come across, include as a valid rhetorical and symbolic genre what they called reverses of medals. Since almost every Roman coin known in the Renaissance was used in some way as the basis for an emblem[3] and subsequently some medal designs took inspiration from emblems, it is appropriate that we should include them in this survey. Also I shall briefly refer to another category of literary genres, the lapidaries or descriptions of collections of precious stones since they also had a bearing on the motifs of emblems and other symbolic genres.

It was natural enough that the renewed interest in classical culture should include collections of classical remains and this included coins. Coin collecting became a mania during the period and those with famous collections included Petrarch himself, the Medicis of course and Grolier

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1 See Mason Tung *Emblematica* 10, 2, 1996 425

2 By Pierandrea Mattioli of 1586

3 Bath 6

the 16th century French collector and eponym of the present day literary club located in New York City. Later John Evelyn, the diarist, wrote a book on coins and medals, the *Numismata* of 1697,[1] and during the period the practice of sculpting and pressing art medals became a recognized art form; the artist Pisanello (1395-1455) was one of the pioneers of the genre which continued with the great quattrocento architect Bramante and most famously Benvenuto Cellini who described how "in this period also I made gold medallions, upon which every lord or noble liked to have sculptured his own fancy or device." Coins and medals lent themselves appropriately to the expression of symbolism since the two sides could represent the signifier and the signified, the literal and the allegorical significance. With the inscription on the reverse completing the ensemble, there was clearly a close relationship to the device although Henri Estienne in the section on reverses of medals in his treatise, *the Art of making devises*, makes the distinction between medals and devices as follows: "a reverse is generally but a memoriall of things which are done and past…A device is to demonstrate a rare and particular intent, not yet effected."[2]

The allegorical approach was exemplified by one of the first and perhaps the most influential of works on Renaissance numismatics, the *Discorso sopra le medaglie antiche*, a Discourse on Antique Medals, of 1559 by Sebastiano Erizzo one of the great coin collectors of the Renaissance.[3] His book, in the spirit of the age, gives a partly allegorical and partly historical interpretation of 241 ancient coins from Augustus to Constantine. It also had a foreword by Girolamo Ruscelli, the author of an early book of devices, *Le imprese illustri,* or Famous Devices (1566). The emblem writers, Paradin and Simeoni validated medals as motifs for their work, the *Emblemata* of Sambucus contained an appendix on coins and Claude Menestrier in his life's work in the latter part of the 17th Century, the multivolume *Philosophie des Images,* which we shall examine in more detail later, included a section on medals. Daniel Russell quotes an article from the *Mercure Gallant* of October 1678 written by one M. Gardien which expounds on Emblems, Devices and Reverses of Medals. According to Gardien, these latter, if they were to excel, should have four qualities: nobility and elegance of the figures depicted, the use of hieroglyphs with

[1] Manning 115
[2] Estienne 1645 trans. Blount 1646 42
[3] The word sylloge is now used for a coin collection. In the Renaissance it had a wider meaning to cover any collection of objects.

or in place of the figures, beauty and emphasis of the wording and the proper abbreviation of certain words.[1]

Figure 36 An engraving on a ring gemstone or intaglio from the *Hieroglyphica* of Fortunius Licetus from 1653 showing the signs of the zodiac.

Another literary genre which was popular in the Middle Ages and later was the Lapidary which described the marvelous properties of stones and gems. The first of these was the *Liber lapidum*, the Book of Stones originally composed between 1061 and 1081, by Bishop Marbode of Rennes (1035-1133), a long poem describing the properties of sixty stones. It was widely popular and there were many copies and editions including fourteen printed editions, the first dating from 1511. Much of the material was taken from Isidore's *Etymologiae* which we discussed earlier. It was generally believed that precious stones had extraordinary power both medicinally and for divination and magic even with the ability of influencing God himself.[2] The medicinal effect of precious stones was much greater than that of herbs and as an example we can take the sapphire which according to Marbode can counteract perspiration, ulcers and headaches, induces calm and is a useful aid to prayer.

It is not a coincidence that one of the Renaissance meanings of both emblem and symbol was as a signet ring[3] and this has a number of resonances with themes we have already met. The signet ring incorporated the sign or seal of its owner and had therefore to be carefully guarded. It is likely that the designs of the earliest heraldic coats of arms were taken from the owner's signet ring which was in turn one origin of the device and the motif of the seal as the mechanism which God uses to impress his divinity on the human soul is found in both Ficino and Bruno. There are a number of emblem books which are illustrated by engraved stones set in rings. One of these was the *Hieroglyphica* of Fortunius Licetus of

[1] Daniel Russell *Emblematica* 1, 1, 1986 79. The *Mercure Galant* was a French newspaper founded in 1672 which survived until 1832.
[2] Thorndike, I, 776
[3] Minos' introduction to Alciato 1577

1653 and this particular tradition continued right into the 19th Century with, for instance, *Emblematical Devices* of Samuel Fletcher from 1810 which was copied by Frederick Knight with his *Knight's Modern and Antique Gems* of 1828. To put this latter little book firmly in the emblem tradition, later editions were entitled *Knights Gems and Devices.* According to the introduction and reminding us the words of Alciato, this was "originally designed for the use of Seal-Engravers; yet, when completed, it will be judged to be a work of general utility. (For) the Admirers of the Fine Arts...it contains many subjects for the application and exercise of the mind."

· Figure Poetry ·

A figure poem is printed or written in a shape which reflects the subject of the poem. It is also called visual or pattern poetry and has had a long tradition originating in classical Greek literature where the genre had the name of *technopaegnia.* Meleager of Gadar's anthology of technopaegnia included a famous piece by Simias of Rhodes which was a poem turned in the form of an egg.[1] Not only was *The Egg* shaped like an egg but it had to be read in an egg-like order; the last verse was to be savored after the first and then the second and the second last, until the center was finally reached.[2] Other classical poets who wrote *technopaegnia* included Theocritus, Dosiados, Vestianus and Optatianus and the latter's work is believed to have inspired Hrabanus Maurus (c784-856), Archbishop of Mainz, a Carolingian poet and theologian, whose famous work *In Praise of the Holy Cross* was the first printed figure poem being published in 1503.[3]

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[1] See Westerweel *Emblematica* 6, 1, 1992 37 and Rypson *Emblematica* 10, 1, 1996 1 for further discussion of visual poetry.
[2] The egg may be seen at http://www.exmadrid.com/~poexperiment/ingles/postextualche.html
[3] A copy of this can be seen at //www.ubu.com/historical/early/early01.html (2/4/2004)

"Ecce beato S.
Lux nos dedisse maximE,
Illustris illa credituR,
Sēpiterno quæ celebrāda cultV,
Anglia, insigni generata stirpE,
Beata virgo cum regnare cæperaT;
Eam parem patulæ dixeris arborI;
Tempestate gravi subito ruentE
Huius se foliis tegunt volucreS,
Adeuntq. bruta procubitV
Magnū iuvamen omnibuS
Regina princeps: profugI
Eius celebrāt nomeN:
Gentibus ipsa laC,
Inclyta, virgO,
Non negat, iis simuL
Alma nutrix manV
Miserit auxiliuM.
Det deus itaquE
Impleat annuM.
Vivat & integrA,
Nullibi vnquam deficiens supremuM
Omnibus auxilium, quæ exhibuit piE
BIS locupletur ô patriæ columeN."

Figure 37 Willet's Emblem 1 'In praise of a Good Prince' from his *Sacrorum Emblematum Centuria Una,* emulating Simias of Rhodes and praising Queen Elizabeth.

The first mention of the word *technopaegnia* in the Renaissance is by Fortunius Licetus (1577–1654), the Italian humanist, whom we saw was the author of a book on hieroglyphics. He edited several volumes on the classical writers of technopaegnia as did his contemporary Albert Molnár (1574-1634) a Hungarian writer most famous for his translation of the Psalms into the vernacular Hungarian. Molnar's work was *Lusus poetici,* Games of the poets (1614), an anthology of Latin *technopaegnia.*

In prose writing, the tradition of the technopaegnia was often manifested in chapter endings which were shaped like vases, cups or urns. A number of the epigrams from the Greek Anthology were published as figure poems in the shape of urns. This was considered appropriate since the origin of the epigram was as an epitaph on funerary monuments. There was considerable cross-fertilization between emblem books and figure poems. One example is the unique manuscript emblem book made for Duke Philip II of Pomerania-Stettin in which the pictures were made of lines of minute quotations from the Psalms. In the same year that this was published (1517), J. J. Cramer the son of Daniel Cramer, published a broadsheet also dedicated to the Duke which consisted of an emblem of which the motto was made up of a rebus or set of hieroglyphs.[1]

Pierio Valeriano, whose most celebrated work was the *Hieroglyphica* which we reviewed above, also wrote a pear-shaped figure poem in his *Amorum libri quinque,* or Five books of love, published in 1549 which was intended as a pun on his own name. The *Poematum Liber, Ara Christiani Religioni,* or the book of Poems, Altars of the Christian Religion by Richard Willis of 1573 is one of the most interesting books of visual poetry and was intended for the use of schoolboys at Winchester College in England; Willis actually uses the word *emblema* when introducing one of his poems. A little later in 1591, Andrew Willet wrote an emblem book,

[1] Modersheim, Sabine *Emblematica* 10, 1, 1996 67

Sacrorum Emblematum Centuria Una, A Century of Sacred Enblems, and his introductory dedication to the Queen Elizabeth was a poem shaped like a tree. To add to the conceit the first and last letters of each line spell out the phrase *"Elizabetham Reginam Div nobis servet Iesus incolumen. Amen*. Elizabeth Queen, long may Jesus keep us safe. Amen."

A few emblem books had some or all of their poems in the form of figures. Examples are those of Francis Quarles, *Hieroglyphiques of the Life of Man* published in 1635 and Christopher Harvey's, *Schola Cordis*, the School of the Heart of 1647.

In his *Ova Paschalia*, Easter Eggs, of 1634 Stengelius constructed each emblem in the shape of an egg as are all the poetic references. An emblem from this book is said to be the inspiration for a scene in *Gullivers Travels*. There were however some contemporary commentators who thought the writers of figure poetry went too far to be regarded as serious artists. Gabriel Harvey (1550-1630), one of the most outspoken literary men of his generation, writes derisively of "this odd rimінge with many other triflinge and childishe toyes to make verses, that shoulde in proportion represente the form and figure of an egg, an ape, a winge and sutche ridiculous and madd gugawes and crockchettes, and of late foolishely reuiuid."[1] And another writer who met with contemporary derision was the poet Edward Benlowes (1602-76) of whom it was said that "as for altars and pyramids in poetry, he has outdone all men that way; for he has made a gridiron and a frying pan in verse, that, besides the likeness in shape, the very tone and sound of the words did perfectly represent the noise that is made by those utensils."[2]

In spite of these criticisms, the genre was clearly in the tradition of the age; it had the imprimatur of George Puttenham who in his *Art of English Poesie* of 1589 had outlined the shapes that were acceptable poetic usage. The practice added yet another dimension to the literary art form and came to its apogee in the 17th Century with the poems of the English poet George Herbert. Peter Daly, quoting the dictum of Horace on the closeness of painting and poetry perceived by classical artists, says of figure poems that they are "the pinnacle of ut picta poesis poetry." [3]

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[1] Gabriel Harvey, "*From Harvey's 'Letter-Book, c 1584 Elizabethan Critical Essays* ed. G.Gregory Smith, 1904, 1:126. Cited by Roland Greene at *//www.ubu.com/papers/greene.html#foot6* (2/4/2004) who also cites a number of other authors abusive of the genre.

[2] Butler 1680 quoted in Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable.*

[3] Daly 1998 142