



7. *The Allegorical Tradition*

Allegory was and is used in a broad sense as a synonym for symbolism but here I shall address it as a specific literary form to be distinguished from the other species we have reviewed so far. In this specific form, it is of a different lineage from that which led from the fables and epigrams through the books of illustrated proverbs and up to the emblem books. Normally characterized by a well-developed narrative, the literary allegory has more resonance for the modern reader, is less dependent on the demands of Rhetoric and provides a bridge for literary forms between the age of symbolism and modern times. Fletcher characterizes some twelve different forms of allegory¹ and these run on a spectrum from epic poems to the prophetic types of the Old Testament. But in all these senses, allegory retained its dependence on the symbolic mode and on the medieval didactic function of literature with its imperative to point a moral and it forms the backdrop to all literary culture of the late Middle Ages. As such it is a necessary part of our enquiry with the advantage that we can explore within it the seeds of modern literature and the decline of symbolism.

¹ Fletcher 1975 3

The etymology of the word allegory is from a combination of three Greek words *allos*, *agora* and *euein*. The last two mean ‘marketplace’ and ‘to speak’, and so together mean to speak openly or in public. *Allos* means ‘other’ so the whole word combined is negative: to speak in a manner which conceals the real meaning. This obviously contrasts with the aim of Rhetoric which was the art of speaking persuasively in public, although allegory was recognized as one of those figures of speech which were the elements of Rhetoric. The Greeks also used another word ‘*hypo- noia*’ to describe a trope with a hidden meaning and Aristotle defines allegory as extended metaphor. In this definition he was followed by Quintilian, one of the fathers of Rhetoric and later Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologies* gives it its Latin name – *alieniloquium* or ‘other speaking’.

Any serious piece of writing has secondary or hidden meanings, political, moral or spiritual. The allegory is merely rather overt about such intentions and personification, perhaps the most obvious of the mechanisms employed to this end, has become almost a symbol of allegory. We have already seen how the origin of some of the Greek myths lay in the personification of the elements. Homer employed personification continually as an extension of the Gods. In the *Iliad* he describes Strife thus: “her crest is lowly at first but afterwards she holdeth up her head in heaven.”¹

It has been said that the Greeks developed allegory in order to reconcile their love of Homer with the rationalism of the later Greek philosophers.² The words of the bard must conceal a secret wisdom beneath the stories of the myths and this would go some way to meet Plato’s complaint about the poets. The poets could be said to be useful citizens because their divine words could be allegorically interpreted to reveal moral *dicta*. But the issue that underlies this assumption reveals a divergence of opinion which even Plato admits is ‘ancient’³ and which was the origin of the debate which continued through out the whole of classical and medieval times and which we reviewed in an earlier Chapter (page 121). Should art, including of course prose and poetry, be for pleasure or should it be primarily useful?

The Romans used allegorical devices to explain some of their more extreme myths. The one which is always quoted is the story of Saturn eating his children and this was to be interpreted as Time carrying his sons away. The rhetorical figure of personification was further reflected

¹ *Iliad* IV, 442 cited in Curtius 103

² See the discussion in Curtius 203

³ Plato *Republic* 607C

in the cults of the minor Roman deities. As well as the Olympian Gods, the Romans venerated minor deities with names such as Mind, Piety, Nature, Fortune or Concord. With the decline of Roman culture and the rise of Christianity, the importance attached to these gods faded and their places in literature were taken by the apotheosis of the abstract ideas which they represented.

It also seems that during Roman times ethical thinking underwent a change from the moral traditions that had been inherited from the Greeks. C.S. Lewis has shown how Roman ethics went through a crisis during which the idea of conscience¹ was adopted as a standard of what was right and wrong. According to Lewis this itself led on to allegory. We have already seen how the Greeks did not have the same sense of struggle over moral difficulties that we have now. According to Aristotle a good man did what he did not because it was morally right (in our sense) but because he liked doing it and so “pleasures and pains are the things with which moral virtue is concerned.”² The ethical standard of the Greeks was fate and to overstep the bounds of fate, to go beyond the place which fate had ordained for you in the hierarchy of society or in relation to the Gods, was to invite moral sanction and divine retribution. The moral criterion of the Romans, however, was much closer to our own and the emergence of the idea of conscience represents a stage in the continuing struggle between the rights of the individual and those of society as a whole, between the ability of the individual to think for himself and set standards for his own behavior and the obligation of the tribe, group or state to set and maintain order for the benefit of all of its citizens. Thus Christian ethical teaching may have come at a propitious and fertile moment in history although the Church establishment as it became entrenched, developed a moral and dogmatic structure and order of its own which discouraged individual thinking on the matter of morals at least until the Reformation. Nevertheless as Lewis says,

It is plain that to fight against Temptation is also to explore the inner world and ...we cannot speak, perhaps we can hardly think, of an inner conflict without a metaphor; and every metaphor is an allegory in little. And as the conflict becomes more and more important, it is inevitable that these metaphors should expand and coalesce, and finally turn into the fully-fledged allegorical poem.³

¹ Lewis 1976

² Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1104b trans. H. Rackham

³ Lewis 60

So from the early days of the modern era, allegory became a widely used literary and moral device. Philo of Alexandria's *Legum Allegoria* or Allegorical Interpretation, was, as the title implies, a detailed allegorical interpretation of the stories of Genesis which also prefigured the Christian practice of typology. For instance, Philo suggests that the story of Adam and Eve is the allegory of the coming together of the Soul and the sensory and material elements of the microcosm. Adam is pure mind or soul and Eve the embodiment of sense perception. The materialization of the soul when they eat the apple brings about the fall from grace. These stories of Genesis, which mirror to some extent the creation myths of the Greeks as related by both Hesiod and Ovid, express in a general way heroic allegorical attempts to give meaning to human origins and purpose.

Hesiod's *Gigantomachia* describing the battle for the creation of the Earth in his *Theogony* was also the first illustration of the struggle or fight, the first of the two principal themes of allegory. The second was the journey or quest. Both of these themes provided opportunity for moral temptation and for demonstrations of how this temptation should be overcome. Most likely this myth of struggle or combat was a metaphor for the great dualities of existence exemplified by the dualities of Pythagoras which I referred to above (page 12) and even for creation itself, the ordering of the primeval void, the making of *cosmos* out of *chaos*. The first Christian allegory, the *Psychomachia*, by the poet Prudentius, was a facile attempt to describe the struggle for the soul between Good and Evil emulating the activities of the pagan Gods. The *Psychomachia* was however important for the history of medieval literature since its personified depiction of the vices and virtues, particularly depiction of the latter as female figures, became the model for the allegorical struggle of good over evil for the remainder of the Middle Ages at least until the 14th century. Thereafter there was a change; the allegory of choice became that of the Pilgrim journeying through life, overcoming the perils of material temptation, earning his place in heaven and achieving reunion with God. The first of these later allegories was a French work, the *Pelerinage de Vie Humaine*, the Pilgrimage of Human Life, written by Guillaume de Deguileville between 1331 and 1350 in which Mankind is depicted traveling with his Scarf of Faith and Staff of Hope. Later there was Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress*, the most celebrated in a long line of such stories, which took their place beside the classical epics which had told of heroic journeys. It has been shown that the 230 emblems of Whitney's *Choice of Emblems* of 1586, one of the first English emblem books, are structured to represent

such a pilgrimage¹ but by the 17th Century the allegory as the mode of choice to describe the world was becoming outdated and as Rosemary Freeman points out *The Pilgrims Progress* was an anachronism before it was conceived.²

The assimilation of the functions of the classical Gods into Christian thought was continued in other early allegorical works including that of Martianus Capella, the *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, the Marriage of Learning and Eloquence, from about 500 AD which is believed, like several of the other books we have come across, to have been written for the author's son. Not only was this a milestone in the development of literary allegory and personification, it was also a textbook description of each of the liberal arts as they were given by Mercury to his bride. It was popular throughout the Middle Ages and later; there were eight editions of this book between 1499 and 1599 and Leibniz himself contemplated editing an edition.³ It was also the source of many of the figures in Ripa's *Iconologia*.

In the Middle Ages, there were other early allegorical texts which were influential such as the *Thebaid* by Statius and the *Metamorphosis* or Golden Ass of Apuleius but by the time of the Renaissance the process had been reversed. The figures of medieval allegory were gradually superseded by those of the rediscovered ancient mythologies. At first in works in such as the *Roman de la Rose* and the *Epistre d'Othea* these figures coexisted but slowly as enthusiasm for the classics widened, the importance of allegory correspondingly lessened and gradually wasted away. But during the Middle Ages allegory and the characters of allegory, personified abstractions, were universal in literature and dogma. The Venerable Bede at an early date had recommended the use of allegory saying that "allegory excites the spirit, animates the expression and ornaments the style"⁴ and Huizinga confirms that

For the people of the time [allegorical figures] were realities clothed in living form and imbued with passion....Doux-Penser, Honte, Souvenirs⁵ and the others lived in the heads of the declining Middle Ages as semi-divine beings....They are perfectly comparable to Roman divinities that were also derived from abstractions, such as Pavor, Pallor, and Concordia, etc.⁶

¹ K. Borris and M.M. Holmes *Emblematica* 8, 1, 1994 81

² R. Freeman 2

³ Curtius 38

⁴ Cited Eco 1986

⁵ Sweet-thinking, Shame, Memories are characters from the *Roman de la Rose*.

⁶ Huizinga 244

There is only a small difference between describing an idea in abstract terms and in personifying that idea. Thus we might suppose that the title of Boethius' masterpiece *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, The Consolation of Philosophy, promised a treatise which would give solace to the author through the contemplation of the concepts of philosophy. On the contrary, Philosophy is the name of Boethius' nurse who consoles him as he awaits death with an orthodox dialectical discussion. It is almost just a matter of capitalizing the abstract concepts although today now that allegory is out of fashion such a device would be regarded as archaic and pedantic.

There were late medieval allegorical and didactic epics which were drawn on Prudentius and Martianus Capella and these included works by the 12th century writers Bernard Sylvester's *De Universitate mundi*, Of the Universe, of 1147 and Alain de Lille with his *Anticlaudianus* of 1181. Both of these are creation epics with references to Ovid and a full complement of personified human emotions and attributes, classical references, characters and Platonist theories. The *Anticlaudianus* included an encyclopaedic summary of the seven liberal arts and theories of divine revelation. It is easy to see that the later work of Colonna, the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, which I describe in more detail below (page 242), with its wide-ranging descriptions, personifications and Platonic mysticism was completely within this tradition of the medieval philosophical epic. Interestingly, Alain de Lille describes the summit of man's ascent to the vision of the Divine forms as enabled by way of *theophanicae coelestis emblema*, a symbol of divine revelation. According to him, reason was not enough; emblems or symbols provided an intuitive or visual aid to understanding.

The greatest of all the Renaissance allegorical epics was of course the *Commedia*¹ of Dante (1265-1321) first printed in Florence in 1481. Not only was Dante a pioneer in the revival of classicism, the first 'to thrust antiquity into the foreground of national culture',² his great work illustrates many of the themes we have been discussing. It is the archetypal embodiment in the Renaissance of philosophy and aestheticism, not only philosophy expressed poetically but the drama of creation as a poetic³ and aesthetic act. The framework of his story is based on the cosmic system of Ptolemy, he treats Christian and classical doctrines in parallel and the three parts of the book represent the three types of understand-

¹ The epithet Divine was added by later editors, the first such being the Venice edition of 1555 and was derived from Boccaccio's description of the epic in his *Vita di Dante*, Life of Dante.

² Burkhardt 121

³ Dante was well aware of the double meaning of the Greek word *poiein* to create.

ing of God. He specifically states in one of his letters¹ that the interpretation of his work must follow the fourfold interpretative schema of the scriptures and these are mediated by his several guides; Virgil represents interpretation by reason, Beatrice by faith and St Bernard by revealed wisdom. In addition to his guides there is 'Dante' himself who is more than just a narrator; he is a player in the narrative who contributes his own commentary on the action and whose character changes and develops as the poem proceeds until at the climax he becomes a mystical figure and is apotheosized as he ascends through the circles of Paradise to reach union with God. A background to the whole epic are the 'shades', the individuals he meets during his journey through the Underworld who allegorize the Platonic notion of material things being the shadows of reality; in the words of Statius from the poem, Dante treats 'the shades as solid things'. For Dante the afterlife is reality. Earthly life is but the type of our eternal existence; we prefigure in our earthly deeds and actions what with God's judgment will be our fate in the hereafter.² No better eulogy of Dante's achievement can be quoted than that of Curtius.

Love, order, salvation are the foci of his inner vision – spheres of light in which immense tensions are collected. They dart together, circle one another, become constellations, figures. They must be expanded into shapes, choirs, chains of spirits, laws, prophecies. The whole plenitude of his inner visions must be applied to the whole extent of the world, to all the heights and depths of the world above. The most immense frame of reference is required. From every point of his mythically and prophetically amplified experience connections run to every point of the given matter. They are forged and riveted in material as hard as diamonds. A structure of language and thought is created – comprehensive, with many layers of meaning, and as unalterable as the cosmos.³

Another of the giants of the early Renaissance was Petrarch who, apart from his Latin compositions and his great collection of *Canzonieri*, some three hundred and sixty-six lyric poems inspired by his beloved Laura, was renowned for his *Trionfi* or Triumphs. These were a series of poems on the successive triumphs of Love, Chastity, Death, Famine, Time and Eternity. According to one scholar, the *Trionfi* outshone the *Canzonieri* and Dante's *Commedia* in popularity for more than 100 years.⁴ Inspired by the triumphal processions of the emperors and generals of Rome after their victories, and featuring captives and attendants who

¹ Epistle 10 para 7 cited in Hopper 137

² On this aspect of Dante's beliefs see the discussion in Auerbach 197

³ Curtius 379

⁴ According to E. H. Wilson who translated the *Trionfi* into English in 1963

were either personified allegorical figures or great men and women from the past, Petrarch's conceits were hugely influential on all forms of Renaissance representation including poetry, painting, tapestry, medals, theatre and emblems.

Triumphal processions and pageants became a popular entertainment throughout Europe particularly in Elizabethan England to the extent that Puttenham commented upon them in his *Art of English Poesie*, Francis Bacon wrote an essay, *On Masques and Triumphs* decrying the genre and Sidney described one in his *Arcadia*. The edition of Petrarch's *Triumphs* of 1471, with a commentary by Antonio da Tempo was one of the first printed books. Ironically, the poem might just have been confined to the first two Triumphs but for the Black Death, that great scourge of plague which swept Europe from 1347 to 1350 and which, it is estimated, killed one third of the population. *The Triumph of Death* was written in 1348 and the others followed later at intervals.

The plague affected the sensibility of the survivors for generations to come. A parallel genre to the poetic representation of the Triumphs was that of the *Danse Macabre*, the Dance of Death. These originated possibly as a species of processional or theatrical comedy of which the first are noted in Spain and Germany in the 1360s soon after the Black Death. These spectacles were memorialized in paintings and frescoes all over Europe of which one of the earliest was a painting on the wall of the charnel house in the cemetery of the Holy Innocents in Paris dated from about 1424. This depicted individuals from different social orders being led away by the allegorical figure of Death.

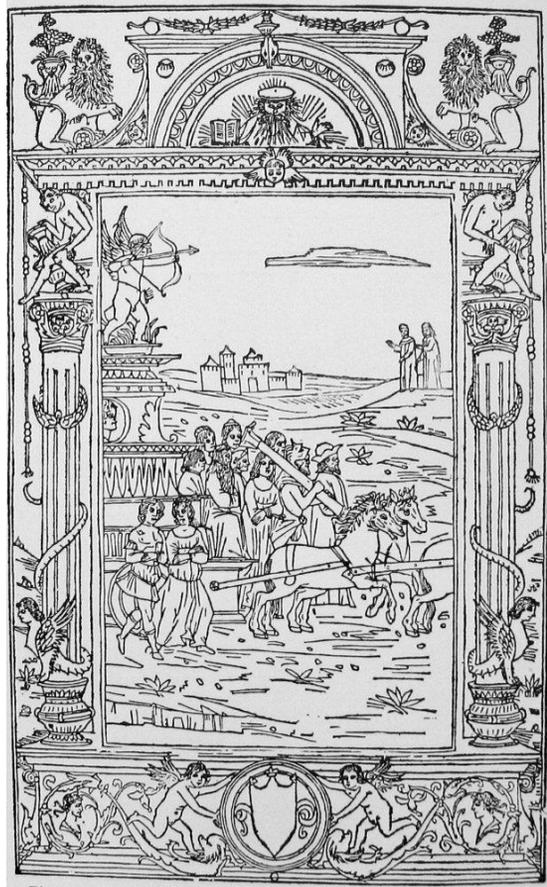


Figure 38 The Triumph of Love from Petrarch's *Trionfi* of 1492.

Ipsē morietur. Quia nō habuit disciplinam, & in multitudine stultitiæ suæ decipietur.

PROVER. V



Il'mourra, Car il n'a receu
En foy aulcune discipline,
Et au nombre sera deceu
De folie qui le domine.

D iii

Figure 39 An illustration of Proverbs V, 23 from the 1538 Lyons edition of Holbein's *Dance of Death*.

The mural was the subject of a book printed by Marchant¹ in Paris in 1486, one of the first of a vast number of such volumes published all over Europe with the simple if rather obvious allegorical message that death comes to everyone whatever his station in life. Perhaps the most celebrated version in the 16th century was that with woodcuts by Holbein from 1526 which was called the *Totentanz*. Drexel, the prolific Jesuit emblem writer, also composed in 1633 a Dance of Death called *Mortis Nuntius*, the Messenger of Death.

Lydgate, the English poet, had already made a translation after 1475 of a French poem the *Danse Macabre* but this actually had yet a different lineage being based on a popular Latin poem, the *Vado Mori*, I am preparing to die, which, in turn, was possibly originally composed by one Helinand of Froidmont who lived from 1160 to 1229.² The significance of the genre of the *Danse Macabre* for our purpose as it developed in the 16th Century is that they invariably devoted a motto, a picture and a poem for each of the types depicted, reminding us of the formula for the emblem books. Like the emblem books, versions of the Dance of Death continued to be published right through to the 19th Century, one of the most celebrated being an edition by Thomas Rowlandson, the English graphic artist, in 1814-1816.³

¹In 1490 there was a Latin edition *Chorea ab excimio Macabro*, Dance by the excellent Macaber published by Marnef who also published two editions of the *Narrenschiff*. The word macaber has been shown to derive from the Arabic for gravedigger and there is some evidence such dances did exist in the late middle ages. R. Eisler *Traditio* vi. 1948 187 Marchant also published the *Compost and Calendar of Shepherds*.

² See Dona 1988

³ David Block of BookBlock, a specialist in the genre, points to Leonard Baskin's *Presumptions of Death* from the Gehenna Press as a great 20th Century example.

Allegory was used not only for spiritual and moral ends but also as a political polemic in circumstances where it might be dangerous to be overtly critical. Spenser's works, *The Faerie Queen* and *The Shepheardes Calendar* were allegorical on many levels in the manner dictated by Aquinas and almost every character in the latter poem has been identified with an historical person. As an illustration, we can take the fifth Eclogue, May, which is one of the most complex and multilayered of the twelve. This spoke primarily to one of the three major themes of the poem, a complaint about the corruptness of the church and it included a fable about a Fox and a Kid from which, on the tropological level, we are taught to beware of flatterers and deceivers. Anagogically, the Goat is Christ, the Kid, the Church and the Fox the devil and finally, on the allegorical level the characters designate political figures, King James of Scotland and the French Duke, Alençon, who was a serious suitor for the hand of Queen Elizabeth in marriage¹ although this suit was opposed by many in the court and the country including Spenser. On yet another level, the Calendar followed the allegorical traditions of the genre where the months and seasons of the year depicted the several ages of man.

The *Shepheardes Calendar* is a hybrid literary form: a poem divided into eclogues which only have the most general thematic connections. Each Eclogue in the Calendar had a motto which was entitled the Emblem. The Calendar also included a picture for each Eclogue and this in itself made it unusual for a book printed in England at this time. The poem is an example of the cross-fertilization between the epic narrative allegory and the more static contemplative emblem format; emblem writers were content to employ any material as their inspiration including episodes from other earlier major texts such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In both Mansion's *Ovide Moralizé* and Mielot's translation of the *Speculum Humanae salvationis* the authors used the same parable to justify the practice of relying on these disjointed extracts. They describe how a group of workers fells a large tree and each individual takes from it different pieces which suit his own purpose, one for instance to build his house and another his boat. As we have seen, the Latin word for wood, *silva*, also had the extended meaning of material.²

¹ Melane 302

² D. Russell 55. The Greek word *Hyle*, meaning matter, has a similar etymology to *silva*. Hylomorphic is the English word which describes the Aristotelian concept that existence requires both matter and form. Bernard Sylvestris, the 12th century author of the great Platonic poem *De Universitate Mundi*, supposedly got his name from his preference for the Latin rather than the Greek word which was more commonly used in this context.

Many authors of the allegorical stories of the Renaissance did not risk leaving the interpretation of their symbolism entirely to the imagination of their readers and included directly or indirectly more or less extensive commentaries to ensure that the significance of the piece was not lost. Some authors were blatant in their exegesis. They interspersed their poetry with long prose commentaries illuminating the allegory, drawing attention to their scholarship and explaining and confirming the references and allusions to the classics and the Christian fathers. Such was the case in the second part of the *Roman de la Rose* by Jean de Meung. This epic poem was begun by Guillaume de Lorris but he died before it was complete. Jean de Meung finished the work but in an altogether different style with long, meandering and sometimes irrelevant commentaries.

By the late Renaissance the bonds of doctrinal and spiritual authority had loosened and moral allegory turned to satire and parody. Rabelais, in his great novels, *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua* published over a number of years starting in 1532 took the process a stage further, where the commentary itself was a satire on the events and thinking of the age. For instance, with his customary incisiveness, he was immediately able to get to the bottom of the mystery of the hieroglyphs, which according to him, “none understood who did not immediately understand and which everyone understood who did understand, the virtue, the property and the nature of the things thereby described.”¹

Rabelais challenged much of the remainder of orthodox dogma as well as the abuses of Church and State. He ridiculed divination of all kinds and the object of the final quest of his hero was the Temple of the Bottle where initiation would bring enlightenment of an oenophilic nature although even this scene is a caricature of the Orphic rites. The potential of the fruits of the vine for artistic inspiration and for mystical visions was a wellcharacterized rationalization of the time. Rabelais was like his contemporaries however in his love of classical language and literature and in his delight in the literary opportunities that the printing press had brought him. Similarly, Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, published in 1621, a massive tome of some one thousand four hundred pages, nominally on the causes and cure of melancholy one of the four humors, was in reality an allegory on life itself with countless references to classical and Renaissance authors. In the same genre, there was Cervantes with *Don Quixote*, (1605 to 1615) on the surface a sweeping review

¹ Rabelais 58. It appears that this passage is a parody of the explication of the hieroglyphs by Geoffrey Tory in the *Champ Fleury* who in turn had derived it from Erasmus. See Denis Drysdall in *Emblematica* 2, 2, 1987 233

and condemnation of Spanish courtly society but underneath an allegory on the pathos of the human condition.¹ Later, there was Swift's, *Tale of a Tub*, an interpretation of Reformation history, written in the last years of the 17th Century and published in 1704. The beauty of this, as in Burton's book, lay beneath the surface where it aimed at demonstrating all the folly of human existence. Thus, depressingly for Swift, human happiness lay in "a perpetual possession of being well deceived."

Perhaps the most influential late Renaissance book on the nature of allegory was Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* which tried to categorize traditional symbolism according to the methods of Aristotle in his description of metaphor. Ripa who lived from about 1560 to 1623 was one of the more colorful literary characters of the time. He started life as a cook but rose through the domestic ranks and as Majordomo to the household of Cardinal Salviati found spare time to write his great book which was first published in 1593. Thereupon he was immediately given a knighthood by the Duke of Savoy. Ripa's book is classified by Praz as an emblem book but it is much more. It is an exegesis of the personification of human emotions in allegorical terms. Ripa considered that other abstract ideas had been dealt with adequately elsewhere: nature was treated in the myths he said and propositions which assert or deny are the province of the device.

There were more than forty editions of his book in a total of eight languages and in each new edition further entries were made to the original number both by Ripa himself and future editors so that by the 1764 Italian edition there were more than 1,000 allegories described. The material is taken from all the diverse classical, Christian and oriental sources which we have discussed. The English edition of 1778 was also rewritten and expanded by the translator George Richardson who emphasizes, even at this late date, the importance of the didactic function of literature and art. When discussing allegory and mythology, Richardson says that mythological painting "may extend to those subjects which do not fall within the province of our senses.... it will be found, upon a closer examination, not only that painting may be thus extended but also that its highest perfection consists in this method of employing it." Ripa's book was extremely influential for decorative artists and authors of emblems, devices and other books of symbolism. Henry Peacham in his *Minerva*

¹ Frederick Armas has pointed out in his lecture *A Quixotic Museum: Cervantes and Italian Art* that Cervantes was familiar with the Art of Memory probably through Giambattista della Porta's *Ars Reminiscendi* published in 1602. Cervantes constructs a memory room (1, 25) with five pictures of Dulcinea derived in turn from pictures of famous women by classical and renaissance artists.

Britanna of 1601 based thirty-one of his emblems on Ripa. The latter was also a strong influence on Christopher Giarda whose *Icones Symbolicae* of 1628 was a similar classification and exposition of allegorical subjects. Personification was a staple of these books.

A celebrated and ancient allegory frequently employed by these and other writers and painters in the Renaissance,¹ including Botticelli with his work in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, was the *Calumny of Apelles* a symbolic trope which echoed down the ages in one form or another for 2,000 years. Originally a painting supposedly created in 400 BC by the Greek painter Apelles as his reply to a wrongful accusation, it was immortalized by Lucian in his legal exposition *A Treatise on Calumny* written in the 2nd Century AD and first printed by Bordon in 1494. The Personifications of Envy, Calumny, Fraud, Deceit, Ignorance, Suspicion, Penitence and Truth were happily used to point political and moral truths. The *Calumny* is also an example of *ecphrasis* a rhetorical figure for the poetic description of classical art which was a recurrent inspiration for the emblematisers and other authors. The *Calumny* is used both by Corrozet² and by Coustau in their emblem books.

Another ancient allegorical trope which survived and was universally popular in the art and literature of the Renaissance was the so-called *Tablet of Cebes*. Cebes was a contemporary and friend of Plato and Socrates and member of their circle. According to Plato's *Phaedo* he was one of those present at the death of Socrates. His Tablet was a philosophical discussion and description of a picture set up in the temple of Kronos in Thebes or possibly Athens which depicted a symbolic view of the temptations of life and the means to salvation after death. One of the details of the picture was the image of pilgrims drawing lots from the urn of Fortune before setting out on the path appointed for them by fate. It was described by Menestrier in his *L'art des emblèmes* of 1662 as "one of the most beautiful emblems that we have."³ One of the first French emblem books was *Le Tableau de Cebes* by Gilles Corrozet of 1543 and a picture of the Tablet was used as the frontispiece to Wither's *Collection of Emblemes* of 1635. Wither followed through with the implications of the notion that chance or fate governs the fortunes of man by including a revolving lottery dial at the back of his book which might be used for foretelling

¹ See Massing 15 for a list of these instances.

² Corrozet *Hecatomgraphie* Emblem 42

³ Cited by Judi Loach *Emblematica* 2, 2, 1987 332

what fate had in store for the reader by reference to the emblem which was chosen by the wheel.¹

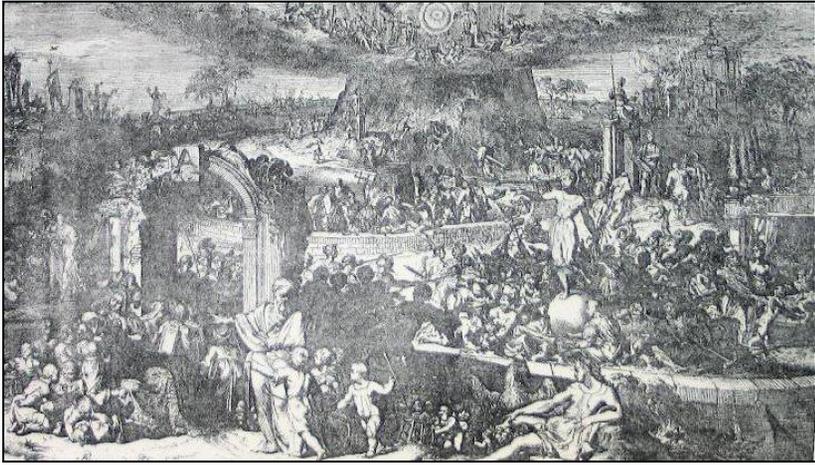


Figure 40 The Tablet of Cebes by Romyne de Hooghe of 1670.

A well-known and equally fundamental allegory was symbolized by the letter Y, itself supposedly invented by Pythagoras, which was intended to illustrate the diverging paths facing us in life - the path of virtue and the path of pleasure. In the *Champ Fleury* by Geofroy Tory of 1529 the Y is illustrated by the story of the hero Hercules who according to the Greek historian Xenophon had a moral crisis as a young man when he was forced to choose between the paths of good and evil.²

The *Champ Fleury*, one of the most famous books in French literature, is a treatise on typography and on the origin and design of Attic type. It was also an attempt to standardize and preserve the importance of the French language by codifying its grammar and accents thus giving it equal authority to Latin and Greek and by implication giving to the work of French authors the same prestige as the classics. Tory justified his thesis by reference to ancient authors and the symbolism of neoPlatonism. Let-

¹ See Bath 1994 Plate 6. Wither got the idea of the moral lottery from an earlier book the *Veridicus Christianus* by Jan David from 1601. Another favorite method of selecting the emblem for the same purpose was by inserting a pin between the closed pages of the book. This method is actually depicted in the frontispiece to the *Openhartighe Herten*, the Openhearted Heart by van der Velde a compilation of heart emblems written between 1618-1627. See Mark van Vaeck *Emblematica* 8, 2, 1994 263. Surprisingly perhaps, lotteries were quite common at this time. The first public lottery in England was held in 1569. 40,000 tickets were sold at 10 shillings each, a huge sum. Queen Elizabeth herself wrote a poem to commemorate the event and the proceeds were used for public works.

² Tory *Champ Fleury* 150

ters were symbols and the shape of letters had a symbolic and mystical meaning. The book was regarded as of such importance for the French that Tory was immediately awarded the position of the *Imprimeur du Roi* (Royal Printer) to the King, Francis 1 in 1530.¹

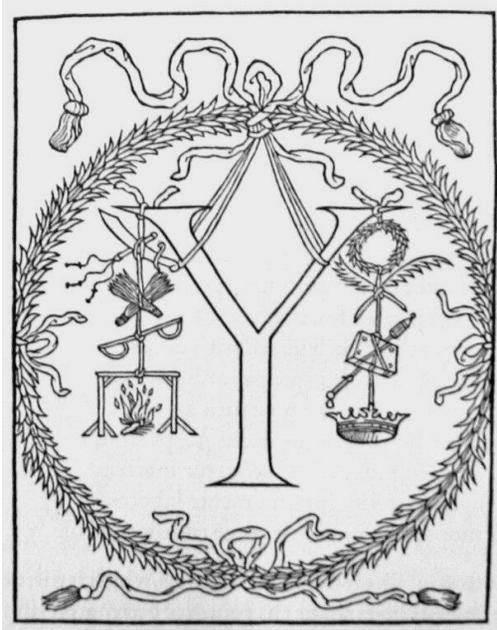


Figure 41 The Letter Y from the *Champ Fleury* of Geoffrey Tory.

The Y was a favorite of the emblem writers and even had its own poem *Carmen de Y littera*, Poem of the letter Y, thought during the Renaissance to be the work of Virgil but now believed to be the only known work of the medieval writer Maximinus. Whitney in his emblem² *Bivium virtutis et vitii*, the Dual way of Virtue and Vice, which illustrates the dilemma of Hercules, quotes five verses from the *Carmen de Y littera* as a gloss to the emblem.

Montaigne also commented on the contrast between pleasure and virtue and the dilemma of Hercules in two of his essays, II, 11, *On Cruelty*, and I, 26, *On the Institution of Children* where, with his customary insight, he puts a new gloss on the topic. Virtue, he says, only reaches its fullest extent in the presence of

temptation implying that the latter must always coexist with the former.³

Another episode in the life of Hercules is worth repeating since it brings together many of the literary threads we have been discussing and this was the origin of the name of the Milky Way. According to Ovid,⁴ the Milky Way was the path of the Gods on the way to the councils called by Zeus in Olympus but by the time of Hyginus this explanation had become more realistic! Since Hercules had been born a mere mortal, he “was given to Juno [the wife of Jupiter or Zeus] to nurse while she slept. When she awoke ... she thrust him away and the whiteness of the milk appears among the constellations.”

¹ Tory also says that he translated the *Horapollo* into French but this translation has never been found.

² Whitney *A Choice of Emblems* 40

³ See the discussion on Montaigne in Jerome Schwartz *Emblematica* 5, 1, 1991 57

⁴ *Metamorphoses* I, 168

The significance of this act of suckling is given by our very own Andreas Alciato who as we shall see was primarily a legal scholar. In his treatise *Parerga Juris* or Accessory Elements of the Law of 1547,¹ he describes how the legal process of adoption is consummated by the new mother suckling the adopted child. As his authority for this dictum he quotes his own emblem, *In Nothos*, on Illegitimate Children! The point is further emphasized by Minos in his commentary in the 1577 edition of Alciato's Emblems where he expounds the higher level symbolism of the emblem that mere mortals such as Aeneas and Alexander the Great can become divine through their heroic accomplishments.²



Figure 41 Alciato's emblem 138 *In Nothos* from the Minos edition of 1577.

Another personification the history of which is relevant to our theme was Prudence. We have seen that Prudence was an essential element of Rhetoric being composed of the three elements Memory, Intellect and Foresight and that this was taken over into the theology of Aquinas. The usual symbol for Prudence was therefore a bust with three animal heads representing the past, Memory, the present, Intellect and the future, Foresight. This symbol has an ancient history being originally the symbol of the Egyptian god Serapis, the three animals being a lion, a wolf and a dog and was known in the Renaissance through the intermediaries of Macrobius and Petrarch.³

The lion's head is a symbol of time present, which midway between the past and the future, has the strength and order of immediate action, time past is represented by the head of a wolf, because the memory of things that are over and done are swiftly borne away; so the likeness of a fawning

¹ The Greek word *Parerga* was used in some contexts as synonymous with *Emblemata*.

² For an expanded version of these relationships see Konecny 1999

³ See Panofsky *Titian's Allegory of Prudence in Meaning in the Visual Arts* 146 for further discussion of the symbol of Prudence of which this summary does not do justice to the full complexity of its history.

dog indicates the issue of time to come, the object of our hopes, which are uncertain but flattering.¹

As well as by a number of emblem writers, the symbol was subsequently validated by many of the authors we have already met including Cartari, Colonna, Valeriano, Giordano Bruno and Ripa. Some emblem writers however preferred to use the less esoteric symbol of Janus with his double head representing just the past and the future. Alciato's 18th Emblem entitled *Prudentes* is illustrated by a double Janus head² and the first emblem of *Le Theatre des Bons Engins*, The Theater of Fine Devices of 1539 by La Perrière, the second emblem book after that of Alciato, also depicts Janus.³ Interestingly, Minos in his commentary on this emblem also quotes for Alciato's authority the same book of Macrobius' *Saturnalia* as that which Petrarch had used for the triheaded animal bust of Serapis.⁴

According to Hyginus, Janus ruled over ItalyHe is believed to have two faces ... a reference no doubt to the foresight and shrewdness of the king as one who not only knew the past but who could also foresee the future, just as Antevorta and Postvorta are worshipped at Rome as deities most fittingly associated with divination.

It is noticeable in both these extracts that there is no reference whatsoever to Prudence; rather the emphasis is on the association with divination which would tend to deny the individual will necessary to exercise prudent judgment.

By the end of the Renaissance, the trope of allegory was universal but becoming mannered and trite. In the words of Huizinga it had become a mental game: 'the meaningful became meaningless.' It gradually took on the nature of the enigma which 1,500 years earlier, Quintilian had already condemned as being a poor kind of allegory.⁵ Sternly, as one would expect, Martin Luther tried to have the last word. "Allegorical studies are the work of idle people. Or do you think it would be difficult to spin and allegory about any given matter? Who is so poor in mind that he could not try his hand at allegory?"⁶ We could turn against Luther, the beautiful words of the Old Testament where it is said that "wisdom cries aloud in the streets: in the markets she raises her voice"⁷ but the use of allegory

¹ Macrobius *Saturnalia* 1, 20, 13 trans. Percival Davies

² Alciato 115

³ Some authorities incorrectly refer to this emblem as a tripartite motif.

⁴ *Saturnalia* 1, 7, 19 trans. Percival Davies

⁵ Quintilian. 8. 6. 52. 4-6

⁶ Luther *De captivitate babilonica ecclesiae* cited in Huizinga 248

⁷ *Psalms* 1, 20

and personification inevitably declined as a central feature of literature along with the decline of literary symbolism. John Ruskin, belatedly claimed to have identified what he called the pathetic fallacy to describe the figure of speech where human feelings are ascribed to animals or inanimate objects.¹ This is nothing more than the figure of Personification but Ruskin is right when he said that in modern times personification will easily degenerate into sentimentality except in the sensitive hands of the greatest poets.

¹ Ruskin 1856 III Ch. 12