



9. *Emblem and Device*

The books of emblems and devices are the final categories of symbolic literature which we shall review. They are unique in several ways. They flourished after the Renaissance so that they were able to make use of the vastly wider vocabulary of subject matter which had become available through the revival of classicism and they had a much larger circulation as products of the printing press. Printing also enabled the widespread use of images as a standard part of the signifier which in turn made the genre more accessible and more attractive to the wider reading public as well as adding a further element to the puzzling nature of the ensemble. First, I discuss the emblem, which had by far the largest audience amongst the literature of symbolism, and I will review its origins and development, its separate evolution in the different countries in Europe and its use as a weapon in the religious wars of the Counter Reformation. The last Section covers the device; appropriately, since this was regarded as the acme of the whole field, certainly by Scipioni Bargagli, who, even if he was somewhat given to hyperbole, sums it up: “a devise is nothing else but a rare and particular way of expressing oneself; the most com-

pendious, most noble, most pleasing and most efficacious of all other that human wit can invent”.¹

• The Emblem •

We thus come to the emblem book, a unique but eclectic form which in hindsight seems a natural and inevitable outcome of the literary genres we have been reviewing. The emblem became part of the accepted literary armory of the age and had a vast influence over the decoration, art, theater, literature and culture of the following two centuries.

So what was an emblem book? It consisted of a series or collection of ‘emblems’ each of which in its classic format comprised three parts: a motto or *inscriptio*, a picture, the *pictura* and a brief poem or *subscriptio* describing or illustrating the theme represented in or by the other two elements of the ensemble. Although this was the standard format it was not the only one and there were many variations on the theme. Some books had up to ten or twelve parts for each emblem and some as I have noted had long and detailed commentaries on the origins and history of the symbolism of each emblem with biblical or classical references. Yet others, sometimes called naked emblems, had no pictures and consisted only of the remaining two elements, a motto and a poem. As regards form, we have seen that although the emblem genre generally followed the tripartite arrangement eventually settled by Alciato, in many cases it did not. Whitney in his *A Choice of Emblems* added to the orthodox format a fourth and fifth element, first a dedication to a worthy patron for each emblem and sometimes a piece of Latin verse and Quarles in his *Emblemes*, perhaps the best of the English emblem books, had six parts; the picture, the motto in Latin or English, a biblical quotation, an explanatory verse, a quotation from the church fathers and a short epigram. The *Conceptus Chronographicus de Concepta Sacra Deipara* of 1712 by Joseph Zoller had seven parts. In *Ashrea*, the English emblem book of 1665 which was designed so that the emblems would act as memory places for the eight Beatitudes of Christ, there were eight parts to each emblem. A similar Catholic devotional emblem book the *Parthenia Sacra* by H A, a pseudonym most likely referring to Henry Hawkins, of 1633 had nine parts including two pictures one of which was called the Devise and the other the Embleme. There were many other examples where there were two

¹ Quoted in Estienne 1645 trans. Blount 1646 13

sets of pictures for each emblem, for instance, the book by Johann Kraus, *Heilige Augen-und Gemüths-Lust* of 1706.

Despite these variations, the three-part emblem was the standard format and provided an ideal representation of a symbol, the signifier, the purpose of which was to conceal as well as reveal meaning. Contemporary theorists emphasized that the meaning of the trope, the object of the sign, should neither be too obvious nor too obscure. On one level this injunction was intended to enhance the intellectual pleasure of the emblem reader but more importantly it was to provide an ambiance of meditation and mystery, a mystery which had always been perceived as a step, perhaps the necessary or final step, in the process of the approach to and appreciation of the nature of reality and of God. The multipart format of the emblem and device gave scope for depicting or describing several motifs in one ensemble and of multiple interpretations of these motifs. It provided a satisfactory conjunction of picture and text, uniting those two contrasting literary threads, and it offered a compromise in the perennial mystical/rational philosophical dilemma as to the superiority of either intuition or rationalization in the effort to approach God.

The number of emblems in any single edition ranged from up to ten to many hundreds. As we have just seen, the English book *Ashrea* had eight emblems. Joachim Camerarius' *Symbolorum & Emblematum Centuria*, a Century of Symbols and Emblems, first published in 1590 originally had one hundred emblems but subsequent editions expanded to a final total of four hundred. Jacobus Boschius in his *Symbolographia* of 1702 was only satisfied with a total of some two thousand emblems and devices. This however was exceptional; a round and average figure was one hundred, a number which was validated by traditional classical and medieval number theory.¹

Motifs or signifiers from the early emblems were mostly of three types: examples from natural history following the bestiary tradition, of episodes from a fable or ancient history or proverbs illustrated by a scene from everyday life. But soon they developed a vast range of subject matter and as I have tried to indicate with some of the examples in the present book, the interpretation of just one of these emblems, could provide a contemporary commentator or indeed a modern scholar with ma-

¹ We have discussed the importance of Pythagorean number theory and one hundred was a favorite number for many authors. The most obvious and celebrated example was Dante with the 100 Cantos of the *Commedia* but there were others who took the idea to obsessive lengths such as Francesco Filelfo in the 15th Century who wrote 10 satires with 100 lines, 100 epigrams of 100 lines each and 5 books each with 100 odes of 100 lines each. He intended to write 10 books but never finished the last five.

terial for pages of commentary or indeed a whole article or monograph. From these bare statistics, it is possible to get a just a glimpse of the extent and fascination of the genre but clearly in such a brief survey it is only possible to touch the surface of the genre. In the words of Hachtenburg of Francfort quoted by Henry Green in the introduction to his pioneering study on *Whitney's Choice of Emblems* of 1866: "not one in a hundred can produce a really good Emblem: not one in a thousand is competent to pass judgement on the Emblems of others."¹

The latest approximate count of emblem titles including distinct editions of the same book is about six thousand five hundred, more collections are frequently discovered by researchers and the total number of emblems was likely much larger than appears from the published collections we have, since some writers boasted that their published output was just a selection of their emblems they had composed.² Many of the individual emblem books, originally written in Latin, went through many editions in several vernacular languages particularly Italian, French, Dutch, German, Spanish and English. These different editions in many cases were not just reprints but revised and much expanded versions. The first and best-known of the emblem books, Andrea Alciato's *Emblematum Liber*, first published in 1531, had 130 editions during the years up to 1790 as well as 50 further editions in translation. Alciato died in 1550 and his book of emblems of that year contained the definitive final number of emblems but many further editions were published after his death. The book was regarded as of such academic and general interest that several of these further editions contained added commentary by other writers of which one of the most celebrated edited by Thulius and published in 1621 by Tozzi had over one thousand pages of reference and commentary. Plantin, one of the best-known and largest publishers in Europe, based in Antwerp, published a new emblem book every year from 1560 until his death in 1589. The 17th century was the heyday of the emblem book but they were still published through the 18th and 19th centuries in admittedly dwindling numbers. And in the last years of the

¹ I have been unable to find the original quotation in Hachtenberg's *Mikrokosmos* of 1577. However in the *Philothei symbola Christiana* of Paul Hachenburg of 1677 there is the following extract (Page 6) "No person is capable of producing a good Emblem other than one thoroughly imbued with profound learning." (trans. Clements) I suspect that Green quoted from memory and got the exact wording and citation wrong.

² Gabriel Rollenhagen in his *Nucleus Emblematum Selectissimorum* of 1611 pronounced that the two hundred emblems in his book were the most select nucleus of the five hundred he had composed. See Manning 86

20th century, a number of original emblem books have been published in English evidencing a genuine revival of interest in the genre.

Within this huge corpus there were many subgenres and amongst those there were naturally developments and changes over the years. Differences evolved between the emblem books of different European countries. The Dutch were renowned for emblems of love, a trend which began with secular eroticism and was then transformed into themes of devotional Christianity. The Spanish subsumed the emblem book as part of the *Sigla D'oro*, 'The Golden Age', of Spanish literature from about 1550 to 1700. The Jesuits adopted the genre in the middle of the 16th Century as a weapon in their determined campaign to restore the vigor of the Catholic church after the Council of Trent. Approximately one thousand seven hundred emblem books by Jesuit writers have been identified.¹ Another subgenre included musical compositions to be sung or played as an element of each emblem. Paul Raasveld has identified twenty-seven examples of this type printed in Holland alone² and there were also German examples. Von Hohberg's, *Lust and Artzney-Garten*, was a translation into German of the Psalter with music added for each Psalm, a prayer and a double emblem.³ Michael Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens* had an original musical composition which accompanied each of his emblems.

One of the first theoretical treatises on the emblem was the rambling introduction to his commentary on Alciato by Claude Mignault (Minos) first published in 1571 but here taken from the 1577 edition. He also defines the emblem by comparing it to the other literary genres which we have reviewed. He starts by indicating that it is a species of symbol analogous to the relationship 'Man is to Animal' with the emblem illustrating a concept specialized compared with the general meaning signified by the symbol. Then he says it is similar to an enigma but the emblem is less obscure. Nor, he says, is the emblem a gnomic saying or maxim although the emblem may contain such maxims. The emblem may be like the maxim if it contains metonymic or syllogistic figures but he implies that this is not typical and in fact rather than relying on word play the emblem may be 'dumb' and omit the subscriptio altogether. This last suggestion, emblems without accompanying epigrams, appears to have been extremely uncommon and would make the emblem difficult to distinguish from the device. Minos then reiterates the difference between maxim or sententia and emblem; the difference is that between *verbum* and *res*, word

¹ G. Richard Dimmler *Emblematica* 2, 1, 1987 139

² Raasveld 1996

³ Paul Raasveld *Emblematica* 5, 1, 1991 47

and idea. Finally, he shows that the emblem is to be distinguished from the adage or proverb. The latter is part of common knowledge whereas the emblem is the product of individual ingenuity or, as later commentators would say, wit.

Although every emblem book had an introduction which attempted to add something to theories of symbolism, unlike the books of devices and as Menestrier says: “there is almost no one who has written on the rules of emblems like those who have written on devices.” And later: “we have no authors who have written specifically on the rules of emblems.”¹ Most authors contented themselves with a brief definition of the emblem. According to Estienne, the emblem was “a sweet and morall symbol which consists of pictures and words, by which some weighty sentence is declared.”² Van Veen in his *Emblemata Horatiana* of 1607 which in the first edition was merely an illustrated collection of the sayings of Horace declares the same. The collection was of “Sentences, which are commonly called Emblems.” Only in later editions were epigrams added to each illustration and the result was one of the most popular emblem books of his time.³ John Hoskins in his *Directions for Speech and Style* of 1599 describes the emblem as a type of metaphor together with allegories, similitudes, fables and poet’s tales.⁴ Thus by this early date particularly in the history of the English emblem and even given the relative fluidity of the definitions, the word emblem had already unquestionably become part of the literary armory.

Tesauro makes the same general definition. According to him, an emblem is “a popular symbol composed of figures and words signifying by means of a motif any theme belonging to human life.”⁵ He emphasizes the popularity of the genre and contrasts it with the device which as we have seen was thought by contemporaries to be of a higher order of literary achievement. In a later passage, Tesauro who, in the Aristotelian tradition, believed in the primacy of the image as part of the process of understanding the sensible world declares that the motto and verses of the emblem are added when the erudition of the motif is too difficult for mediocre minds! Georg Philipp Harsdörffer, the German poet said “The art of the emblem is the thoughtful expression of special reflection by

¹ Cited from early works of Menestrier by Loach in *Emblematica*, 2, 2, 1987 321 which contains a detailed exposition of the differences between the two editions of Menestrier’s work on emblems.

² Estienne 1645 trans. Blount 1646

³ Cited in Bath *Emblematica* 7, 2, 1993 266

⁴ Hoskins 9-10

⁵ Tesauro 488

means of an appropriate simile which is introduced by natural or artificial objects and interpreted in a few thought provoking words.”¹

Modern literary scholarship on the emblem was pioneered in the 1860s by Henry Green with his exposition of *Whitneys Choice of Emblems* (1866), *Four Fountains of Alciato* of 1870 and his *Shakespeare and the Emblem Writers* (1870). Late Victorian collections of emblem books by British collectors particularly those by Bragge, Cautley and Stirling Maxwell became a vogue. The collection of Stirling Maxwell was left to the University of Glasgow and remains one of the largest research resources available for the field. By the early 20th century, the genre had become neglected and even condemned by literary historians. Curtius in his 700 page masterpiece *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* affords the emblem literature only a couple of lines although to be fair the genre did not fall fully into the period covered in his book. Seznec calls emblems ‘*futilités*,’² Wind equally describes them as trivialities,³ Hermann Pongs as superficial⁴ and Benedetto Croce treating emblems with the same contempt as he did the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, described them as “fantastic analogies which under the cloak of instilling love and fear of God and the light of truth into the soul, deceived with an idle pastime.”

Each of these commentators was an important authority in his own right and his opinion deserves respect but the fact is that at the time they were writing the extent of the emblem genre, its origins, its purposes and its influence on contemporary culture was unknown. The seminal bibliography of Praz was a revelation and we have seen that even since Praz, the number of the emblem books known to exist has been greatly extended as has research into the theory and practice of the emblems and its relationship with other facets of Renaissance and Baroque culture. The principle criticism of these authors seems to have been that the symbolism shown in the emblem was entirely arbitrary and capricious. We now know that this is not the case and that the emblem was the product of a long tradition and it employed the standard vocabulary of Renaissance symbolism. It is true that some of the elements of this vocabulary could signify different and apparently contradictory concepts. We have seen that for a Christian the lion had at least four different even contradictory meanings. According to the English Catholic meditational emblem book *Parthenia Sacra* (1633) by Henry Hawkins, the Virgin Mary

¹ Harsdörffer 1641 IV 176-7 cited Daly 1998 120

² Seznec 1940 p 94

³ Wind 1958

⁴ Pongs 1921 14 cited Daly 1998 99 where there is a detailed critique of these early commentators.

could be represented by at least 24 different symbols.¹ But these contradictions do not mean that the symbolism of the emblem was wholly invented by the emblem writers or was without literary or historical significance for their readers. Indeed by virtue of its format, each emblem could express multiple concepts. We are reminded of the words of the Zohar, expressing the beauty of language, that “in any word shines a thousand lights.”² As Peter Daly describes it,³ this dismissive view of the emblem genre only changed when proper research into its nature and purpose was made by researchers such as Praz, Jons and Schöne in the 1960s. Schöne in particular reacted against the earlier critics by defining the emblem in terms of the ‘potential facticity’ of the signifier, that is he required that the motif depicted in the emblem must have a basis in material reality. This definition is now recognized to have swung too far and to be too restrictive in its scope.

The emblem was primarily a symbolic form but I must at least make reference to the literary aspects of the genre; after all, the emblem has been described as the only original art form arising out of the Renaissance.⁴ The commentaries which accompanied many of the emblem books were a step in the development of the essay form pioneered by Montaigne. The vast range of motif and allusion in the emblem fuelled by the newly available material from classical and Christian sources engendered an excitement which in the sterile modern atmosphere of the scientific method we can only dimly emulate or even understand. A modern essayist, George Steiner, describes the intellectual satisfaction to be gained from the exercise of a profound literary experience which can, according to him, provide for the imagination ‘a palimpsest of echoes’⁵ or alternatively a ‘transforming echo’.⁶

The classic reader ...locates the text he is reading inside a resonant manifold. Echo answers echo, analogy is precise and contiguous, correction and emendation carry the justification of precisely remembered precedent. The reader replies to the text out of the articulate density of his own store of reference and remembrance.⁷

The Renaissance had much greater resources to hand to gratify readers in this process than we do today and this is reflected in the extraordi-

¹ Bath 237

² Zohar 3, 202a cited Eco 1986 153

³ Daly 1998

⁴ Isjewijn 1998

⁵ Steiner 1996 17

⁶ Steiner 1986 42

⁷ Steiner 1996 25

nary work, both in style and content, of the great writers of the age. We have seen how educated medieval and Renaissance readers took their task seriously and illustrated their commitment to their authors by contributing marginalia and glosses to the text. These readers had a vast range of symbolic and literary echoes to enjoy from all the sources we have reviewed in this book. Just a whisper of these ancient and modern literary echoes can be experienced in the commentary by Stephen Bann on the *Heroic Emblems* a emblem book by Ian Hamilton Finlay published in 1977 where a series of modern devices with Latin mottos are supplied with commentaries ranging over the whole of western literature from Homer to modern times. But now with the decline of the liberal arts education and with the loss of the art of memory, the failure to exercise the ‘numbed muscles of memory’,¹ the pleasures of the real literary experience are slowly being lost and with them the opportunity to emulate the experience of the readers of these symbolic texts.

Contemporary poets including Spenser, Tasso² and Bunyan tried their hand at the emblem although one of the criticisms of the emblem literature has been that it is devoid of great poetry. This criticism is misplaced. As Gombrich points out the lyrics for opera and classical song are generally not great poetry but this does not prevent the combination of the two, music and lyrics, being great art. The emblem was a unique and original art form and it should be viewed on its own terms. Both poem and emblem resonate with intellect and emotion and from both we can derive a spiritual and a literary experience. The literary resonances reinforce the symbolic and as Huizinga puts it create a true polyphony of thought.³ As in poetry, the emblem was intended to create “a unity of intellectual and aesthetic experience, of sense impression and conveyed thought.”⁴ Boas emphasizes the literary element: “the reading of emblems, one observes, is an intellectual matter; they gratify the feelings, let us suggest, as a literary allusion does.”⁵

In our review of the emblem it is natural enough to begin with the first of them all and with the origin of the inspiration of Alciato and his aims in producing his Book of Emblems, the influence and popularity for

¹ Steiner 1996 18

² Torquato Tasso was one of many Italians who wrote a discourse on devices with his *Dialogo dell'Imprese* of 1594. He is chiefly known for his poetic masterpiece, the epic *La Gerusalemme Liberata*, Jerusalem Delivered, published in 1580 and for this Tasso was habitually compared by his contemporaries to Homer and Virgil. See Clements 17

³ Huizinga 239

⁴ Dieckmann 312

⁵ Boas 24

which he could have foreseen little prospect and for which he had no great very ambition. Alciato has had a disproportionate amount of academic attention devoted to him and his book. To an extent this is justified; he was the first and had a greater influence on subsequent authors than any other. In some sense, he represents and typifies the whole genre and much interest can be and has been generated from critical surveys of his emblems, of their origins and their influence. By contrast, research into large numbers of emblem books particularly the later ones, into their purpose, iconography and structure, has yet to be attempted.

• Alciato •

Alciato's *Emblemata* was not only the first but also the most influential and widely read emblem book. It was first published in 1531,¹ but during his lifetime Alciato added to the number of emblems in the book so that it increased from 104 in the first edition of 1531 to 212 by 1550 although later editions sometimes omitted Emblem 80 which was regarded as too salacious. Later editions also included extensive commentaries on the book ranging from that of Minos (Claude Mignault) first published in 1571 to that of Tozzi in 1621 which summarized the contributions of four earlier commentators including Minos. Perhaps the most authoritative English edition with commentary by Peter Daly was published as recently as 1985.²

Andreas Alciato³ (1492-1550) was a legal scholar who had made an international reputation writing on aspects of Roman law. He had earned his Doctorate in Law from Fasanini, the translator of the *Horapollo* and professor of law at the University of Bologna. Earlier he had studied under Jean Lascaris who had translated the *Planudean Anthology* of Greek epigrams, later to be known as the *Greek Anthology*. Alciato's emblem book, completed by 1521 and published in 1531, must initially have been written as some kind of recreational exercise but it was destined to begin a literary revolution, a revolution that in hindsight, with the background

¹ As we shall see later from a letter of Alciato from 1522, the emblems were written in that year or earlier. There were rumors in literary circles in the 19th century (see Graesse I, 62) that there was an original printed edition from 1522 but this now seems not to have been case. See Green 1870 8 for a discussion of the extensive search he instigated for this early edition.

² Daly, Peter M., with Virginia Callahan, Paola Valeri-Tomaszuk, and Simon Cuttler. *Andreas Alciatus: Index Emblematicus*. University of Toronto Press, 1985.

³ Both the name Alciato and Alciati are used indiscriminately throughout the literature but it is now generally recognized that Alciato is the orthodox spelling.

and in the context of the times that I have described, seems to have been almost inevitable.

This brings us to the question as to what Alciato had in mind when he gave his book the title of *Emblemata*. The topic has been much debated, a debate fuelled by the very few extant references which Alciato left on the topic and which are subject to differing translations and interpretations. We should also remember that what he intended as the title of a book for which he had very little expectation may not and most likely did not have the meaning that it rapidly came to have as the genre exploded in popularity.

The word emblem was widely known and used in the classical period and later. It comes from the Greek *emballo* meaning to throw and then by derivation to inlay and the earliest use of the word in classical times was quite specific. It referred to a type of decorative metal work in which pieces of gold and silver were inlaid on to precious objects. Often these pieces were removable and reusable and Pliny writing in the first century AD mentions a piece which showed the theft of the Palladium, part of the myth of the siege of Troy.¹ By later classical times the meaning had widened to include any inlaid decorative work including mosaic which became one of the principal art forms of the ancient world and the Middle Ages. St. Augustine used the metaphor of mosaic on several occasions to illustrate how the universe was a composition of many different elements and the beauty of the whole could only be appreciated when *the* all the pieces were fitted together.² It is clear from the fact that there was a body of Roman law which dealt with the penalties for the dismantling and theft of inlaid pieces of precious metal³ that the original use of emblems was widespread. Nevertheless, Pliny declared that the practice had already become obsolete by his own time, no doubt because of the extreme expense of the materials.

In the literature of the Middle Ages we can find a few uses of the word. We saw how Alain de Lille used the phrase *theophanicae coelestis emblemata* both in his *Anticlaudianus* and *De Planctu Naturae* in the sense of 'view' or possibly 'mosaic' meaning a symbol or view of divine revelation. Then, according to Didron, the 19th century French author, there is a 13th century manuscript which he has seen and which is entitled *Emblemata*

¹ The many classical references to emblems as inlay are summarized in Cummings *Emblematica* 10, 2, 1996 245. It is also apparent that there was from the earliest times an element of the spiritual and mystical in the word *emballein*. Homer uses it to describe how the gods instilled emotion or power into the heroes of his story. See Dodds 15

² Wills 3

³ These legal references are given in Budé 1508.

Biblia, a copy of the Bible, decorated, he says, with about 300 exceptional miniatures.¹ There were other instances from the Renaissance of the word emblem in its decorative meaning. We have seen how Erasmus used it in his *In Praise of Folly* to describe the pretentious habit of contemporary writers of inserting phrases in Greek into their Latin prose and Milton later used it in the decorative sense in *Paradise Lost*, “the ground more colored than with stone of costliest emblem.”² By contrast, Edmund Spenser used the word in the sense of a motto in his early poem *The Shepheardes Calendar*, in which he emulated Virgil’s *Eclogues*, summarizing each episode of his pastoral dialogues with a brief motto which he called an Emblem. We shall also see how some later emblem writers used emblem and device interchangeably.

One of the most apt references to the metaphorical potential of inlaid art was by Daniello Bartoli (1608-1685 in his *De Symboli trasportati al morale*, On symbols transformed into morals³. Bartoli was one of the most prolific writers of the 17th Century; his collected works take up fifty volumes and he is well-known for writing in a particularly beautiful Italian.

In such works of inlay, one wishes to make it appear as if nature had imitated art ... Is not the source of wonder, and therefore of delight in such works, the fact that one sees one thing used to express another....The same thing happens when we use anything taken from history, from fables, from nature and art, to represent something in the moral order which it is not: in such a way that there should be so much appropriateness and correspondence of reciprocal proportion between truth and its likeness that the whole, so to speak, should not be seen as an artifice of the brain but the philosophy of nature, as if nature had written, almost in cipher, her precepts everywhere.

In the last lines of this passage Bartoli reflects almost as an aside on the Aristotelian/Platonic dichotomy which engaged theorists in the 17th century and which they attempted to coalesce into a single coherent theory.

Alciato made a few references to emblems in his other work and in his correspondence. First, in his treatise, *De Verborum Significatione*, On the Significance of Words, there is the following extract.

Words signify, ideas are signified. Although at times things likewise signify, as for example the hieroglyphs in the writings of Horus and Chaeremon, a

¹ Didron 1843 trans. Millington 1886 II, 22

² *Paradise Lost* iv, I, 703 quoted in Green 1870

³ Quoted and translated without date in Praz 19. *Trasportati* was a technical term describing the central effect of metaphor where meaning is transferred from one word to another which does not usually carry such meaning.

motif [*argumenti*] we have also used in a book of poetry titled *Emblemata*. [I call this quotation ‘Words’]

In this legal work, which became a textbook in the teaching of Civil Law,¹ Alciato distinguishes three possibilities for the origins of the meaning of words, the first that meaning is conventional or is established by current usage, the next that some words at least have a natural meaning and finally the more mystical idea which we have come across before particularly when considering the Renaissance view of hieroglyphs, that words have a magical or symbolic meaning and can, in some sense, embody the object they describe. Alciato, not surprisingly in view of the narrow focus of his immediate legal audience, came down on the side of practicality, of conventional usage, although many commentators on Alciato’s intentions have used this quotation to show the dependence of emblems on the symbolism of the hieroglyph. This is not necessarily the case. Alciato who is writing about the theory of words and reviewing the subject of symbolism, can be said to be emphasizing that there are many types of symbol not merely words, but also ‘*res*’, things, which can act as symbols or signifiers. One example of such a ‘thing’ is a hieroglyph and another is the emblem as conceived by Alciato. Indeed, as Russell has pointed out² although, with the translation of the *Horapollo*, the hieroglyph had entered into the imagination and culture of the Renaissance, the actual use of the hieroglyphs as source material in the emblem literature was relatively limited. Rather the reverse occurred, the emblem influenced the manner of presentation of *Horapollo*. When in 1543 the first vernacular edition of *Horapollo* was published by Kerver it was laid out in the emblem format and thereafter directly or via the world of emblems, the hieroglyph was absorbed into the art and decoration of later centuries.

Another quotation, this time from a letter written in late 1522 to his friend Calvi, indicates Alciato’s apparently modest aim for his book.

I composed a book of epigrams, to which I have given the title *Emblemata*: because with each epigram I describe something from history or nature so as to signify something elegant, from whence painters, goldsmiths and founders can make the sort of things we call badges and fasten to hats or which we call trademarks. [‘Calvi’]

It is one of the ironies of literary history that Alciato assumed that his *Emblems* would have a very limited readership and, in line with the an-

¹ Drysdall, D.L. *Emblematica* 9, 2, 1995 281

² D. Russell *Emblematica* 1, 2, 1986 227

cient meaning of the word emblem as a removable decorative element, intended that craftsmen could use it as inspiration to fashion decorative badges to be used on hats and coats. Surprisingly perhaps, hat badges¹ were big business in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, being particularly popular amongst medieval pilgrims who collected them to indicate where they had visited.² One of the most famous of these was the scallop shell, the badge of Santiago di Compostela. Louis X of France in the 14th Century is said “to have mounted a regiment of leaden saints about his hat” and it became customary for noblemen to wear them decoratively.

Finally from Alciato there is the following,

...we in these festive hours create these Emblems,
figures wrought by famous artists hands
To fix badges on clothes or shields on caps
Or write with silent signs... [Dedication]

This last is from the introductory epigram to the first edition of the *Emblems* of 1531 which was dedicated to Conrad Peutinger, a notable of the city of Augsburg where the book was published. Here we appear to have references to both the decorative and literary objectives that Alciato had in mind. Cummings has pointed out that books of poetry in both classical and Renaissance times were commonly given metaphorical titles which reflected the nature of the work; flowers, woods, garlands, posies and in particular he shows that one genre of such collections described precious gifts, including precious inlaid objects, such descriptions taking the place of the real thing when such gifts were beyond the means of the poet. Emblems the poems described emblems the objects of art. It was a very old tradition; the last two books of Martial's epigrams are entitled *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*. These were the Greek names for New Years gifts and for gifts given by hosts to their departing guests, a common custom in classical times. In Martial's case they were short poems (in the latter case, just distichs) which could accompany such gifts or substitute for them.

¹ See Wolfegg 33 for a picture of a pilgrim's hat with badges, Ferguson 96 picture 82 of St. James with the Scallop shell badge and the frontispiece to Praz which illustrates a hat badge. Rabelais' *Gargantua*, the hero of his eponymous novel completed in 1534, wore a huge cap badge depicting Janus. Janus was the god who had two faces and represented the past and future. He was also the origin of the word January, Janus annuarius, the month which looks to the old and new years.

² See Spencer 1998. Badges were also used as part of the uniform of household retainers to indicate their employers. Similarly, Thomas More in his *Utopia* proposed the use of badges to indicate the ownership of slaves.

Alciato's suggestion that his emblems were created during 'festive hours' reinforces the idea that they were intended initially as no more than recreations, the composition of which he passed the time on a public holiday. Even the publisher of the second edition of 1634 which was probably the first authorized edition did not have high ambitions for the book. He demoted the title from *Liber Emblematum*, Book of Emblems, to *Emblematum Libellus*, Little book of Emblems. *Libellus* from which obviously we get the modern word libelous had overtones even during the Renaissance of something insubstantial and trifling and later as satirical. Wechel who published the first Latin/German edition in 1542 had the same expectation; he described the emblems, in the words of a couplet of Martial, as difficult trifles over which it would be foolish to spend any time! There are continuing contemporary reports of the recreational practice of creating both emblems and devices. In the *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* or Conversational games from the Women's Room, a vast multi-volume description of the social activities of the time, the German poet G.P. Harsdörffer of 1641-2 describes a game based on the emblem. Six different variants are outlined: naming something as the basis for an emblem, choosing a picture and inventing a motto, choosing a motto and inventing a picture, illustrating chapters of the Bible, suggesting emblems from animals in the manner of Camerarius and choosing suitable sayings from the poets as mottos.¹ Similar conversational games inventing devices are described in Castiglione and in Bargagli's *Il dialogo de' giuochi* of 1572.²

It may just be that Alciato did not have particularly firm thinking on this whole matter. There are references in his treatise on dueling³ in which he uses the word *Emblema* on several occasions and always to describe a military badge or ornament of some kind much more akin to the device than the emblem as the latter was subsequently used in the emblem books. Also there is an enigmatic reference in an early letter (1523) written just after the Calvi letter quoted above, where he talks about the existence of texts, not his own, called *Emblemata*, written by one Albutius. Unfortunately, these texts have never been found so we cannot know the nature of their format or whether indeed they might have formed the inspiration for Alciato.

¹ See Daly 1998 96

² Castiglione 1528 and Girolamo Bargagli 1572 both cited in Caldwell 9

³ His *Monomachia* was written before 1528. For the origin of this title see the discussion on Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (page 224).

In spite of his emphasis on the decorative purpose of his work, Alciato had at least a secondary aim, the one which he stated in the extract from 'Words' quoted above. He implies a second meaning to each emblem, something familiar to us from the symbolic tradition we have been reviewing. In the extract from the Calvi letter, he elaborates on this stating that what is signified is something 'elegant'. This on the face of it is rather disappointing and does not provide much further light on the discussion. But the seed of the idea was there, the idea that inlaid art was a metaphor for the omnipresent symbolism of the age, that many meanings could be attached to or inlaid on an original form, that the multiple spiritual interpretations of earthly things which were mandated by Thomas Aquinas and expressed by writers such as Christine Pisan, could be subtly combined in a format which embodied the elements of the contemporary literary tradition and the eclectic sources of the Renaissance humanists.

The introduction to Minos' edition of Alciato's emblems of 1577¹ also contains a useful discussion of the meanings of emblem and symbol as they were then understood. Surprisingly for the introduction to an emblem book much of the discussion was on the theoretical nature of the device which as we have seen was deemed by contemporaries a separate genre from the emblem and which I shall examine below in its proper place. We can see immediately from Minos' essay that his theoretical discussion suffers from the disadvantage that there was no Latin word either for the Renaissance emblem or the device since the two genres had not been invented during classical times. It is understandable both that Alciato had to borrow a word for his new type of composition and that this caused much confusion. Minos himself had to make do with the word *symbolum* for the impresa or device² although there were already many other contemporary meanings for *symbolum* which Minos also outlines.³

Minos mainly obtained his definitions from Guillaume Budé, the legal scholar whom we have already met as providing in the *Annotations on the Pandects*⁴ of 1508 an account of the classical use of the word emblem. We have also seen the word used as a motto or proverb which can be part of the emblem or device. I shall return to Minos' exposition of the

¹ Minos provided commentaries on several editions of the *Emblemata* each time adding to or varying them.

² Cummings in *Emblematica* 10, 2, 1996 246 cites Cassius Dio as relating that the Roman Emperor Tiberius was in a quandary when he wished to promulgate a law regulating the use of inlaid metal. He did not wish to use the word *Emblema* since it was Greek but there was no equivalent Latin word.

³ Including rings, passwords and coins.

⁴ The *Pandects* was the formal name for the body of Roman law.

device in the section on that genre below but in his discussion on emblems, he distinguishes three types, historical, physical or natural and ethical and this classification was followed by subsequent commentators but his confused use of the terms to describe his subject does not make his definitions particularly clear. At the end of his commentary, Minos repeats the words of Alciato from his book on the *Significance of Words* which I have quoted above in terms that showed that he believed that they summarized the nature of the emblem.

It certainly seems that Alciato's original inspiration for his work was the Greek epigram. We do know that Alciato had already started translating some of the epigrams of the Greek Anthology by the time he wrote the Emblems and he contributed some 154 of these translations to the edition of *Epigrams* by Cornarius published in 1529. Some 40 of the 104 emblems in the first Edition of Alciato were direct or loose translations from the Greek Anthology including 29 which were already included in Cornarius' edition. I have commented in some detail on this use by Alciato in the section above on Epigrams (page 154) and we know that he also used some of his own epigraphy as a basis for some of the emblems.¹ Inspiration for others derived from the *Natural History* of Pliny, the *Ecllogues* of Stobaeus and from Pausanias.

We also know that initially Alciato had no intention of using pictures with his work which tends to confirm its epigrammatic origin. This theory is countered by Laurens who points to Alciato's refusal to allow the publication without images of his own book of epigrams from the monuments of Milan since it was too expensive to have his sketches of the statuary he was describing prepared for publication.² Nevertheless, the pictures for the first 1531 edition of the Emblemata were apparently included by the publisher without Alciato's knowledge but a lack of interest by Alciato in this aspect of the composition of his emblems also extended to later editions. After Wolfgang Hunger had persuaded the French publisher Wechel to publish his (Hunger's) German translation of the Emblems, to his dismay Wechel sent him a further large batch of emblems newly arrived from Alciato for translation with the additional request that he prepare instructions for the engraver for the pictures for

¹ A full discussion of Alciato's early epigraphy and its importance for his emblems is contained in Laurens and Vuilleumier 1993 86-95

² It was not unusual, in fact quite common, for a Renaissance book to start life without pictures. There are numerous examples. The extremely successful *Iconologia* by Cesare Ripa was one such. It was not until the third enlarged edition of 1603 that pictures were included. Another was Giovo's *Dialogo dell'Imprese* first published in 1555 with no images.

the new emblems. Apparently, Alciato had not found it necessary to perform this chore himself as he composed each emblem.

• Secular Trends •

France

The French were the first fully to embrace the concept of the emblem book. The second edition of Alciato's book was published in Paris in 1534. This was first that he appears to have authorized since the edition published in Augsburg in 1531 seems to have been issued without his knowledge. Remarkably, a total of fifty editions of Alciato's work appeared before 1560 and all but four of these were in France. After this date, for a number of reasons, French emblem writing and publication suffered a decline. We have already discussed the effects on printing in Catholic countries of the restrictions initiated at the Council of Trent. Presses were moved from Paris and Lyons to Geneva where there was little or no censorship. In addition, the late fifties and sixties was a time of political upheaval in France; there was serious inflation and economic hardship. And there was increasing competition from the new technique of copperplate engraving which allowed much improved book illustration. It may have been that the old woodblocks had become worn from over use and that the cost of converting to the new technology was too great.

The first original French emblem book was *Le Theatre des bons Engins* by Guillaume de la Perrière of 1539¹ subsequently translated into English by Thomas Combe in 1595 as *The Theater of Fine Devices*. As we have seen, the word theater was used in many contexts in the Renaissance to indicate a cultural repository and the first English emblem book was also a theater – *A Theatre for Voluptuous Worldlings* by Van der Noot of 1569.² The format of la Perrière's book emulated a theatrical production since the *subscriptio* of many of the emblems consisted of an address by a narrator who expounded at length to the audience on the meaning of the image. This technique of dialogue between writer and reader was inherited from the *Greek Anthology* where a number of the epigrams took the form of question and answer. La Perrière's book is thus a primitive form of the

¹ The first editions of this book were undated but were probably printed early in 1540. One of these editions had no pictures but this may have been a pirated edition. See Steven Rawles *Emblematica* 2, 2, 1987 381

² Clements 191 lists some ten emblem books with the word Theater in their titles.

emblem genre. There are no mottos and although the material is, as we have come to expect, derived from stories from mythology and the proverbs, including Pythagorean dicta, from the Horapollo and the Poliphili, the author's conceit of explaining and revealing the moral message of the emblem is not at all typical. The later mainstream emblem sought to conceal its meaning and balance the exposition between the three constituent elements.

In Corrozet's *Hecatographie* first published in 1540 there is clearly evolution towards the accepted format. There are now mottos for each emblem and although there is still a narrator the latter takes a much more flexible role: sometimes he expounds the emblem and sometimes he listens with the reader. The effect is a greater balance between the elements of the emblem. The *Pegma* by Pierre Coustau of 1555 published in Lyons shows that the genre had still not achieved a standard format. The meaning of the title of this work is itself somewhat controversial. *Pegma* has generally been interpreted as synonymous with emblem but nowhere in the book does Coustau mention the word emblem. *Pegma* is a rather rare Latin word which was used in antiquity and the Renaissance to mean some kind of structure: a bookcase, a scaffold or a mechanism in the theater for raising and lowering objects.¹ We get a clue from the index of Coustau's book which is entitled *Index Epigrammaton quae Pegmate continentur* or Index of Epigrams which are contained in the (bookcase, structure, theater). Perhaps the best translation is 'staging' which implies both a theatrical production linking with the earlier emblem titles of theater and also the notion of a structure which can be used as a memory device and reflects the elaborate stage mechanisms of contemporary pageants and festivals. Tesauro² in his lists of signs and events which have symbolic function includes stage machinery which he justifies by implying that these mechanisms are providing an illusion of reality. The whole concept possibly comes from Plato's use in the *Republic*³ of the metaphor of stage machinery in the description of his central idea of the soul turning from the darkness of the Sensible world to the light of the Intelligibles. Finally, returning to the *Pegma*, we can note that the index is of the mottos of each emblem and not the first line of the subscriptio; Coustau still conceived of the whole tripartite ensemble as being an epigram.

¹ Suetonius uses the word to describe a piece of stage machinery. *Twelve Caesars: Claudius* trans. Robert Graves 203

² Tesauro Chapter 18, 487

³ Plato *Republic* 518c where he uses the word *periactoi* usually translated as stage machinery.

The French continued to pioneer in the genre. A French manuscript collection of 100 emblems entitled *Liber Fortunae*, the Book of Fortune, dated 1568 was perhaps the first emblem book to concentrate on a single topic.¹ The struggle to control fate was still a dominant concern, as it had been since the earliest times and was depicted by many emblems, under the title of Opportunity, *Occasio* or Fortune, *Fortuna* represented by a Goddess on a wheel or sphere which of course might roll unexpectedly in any direction.

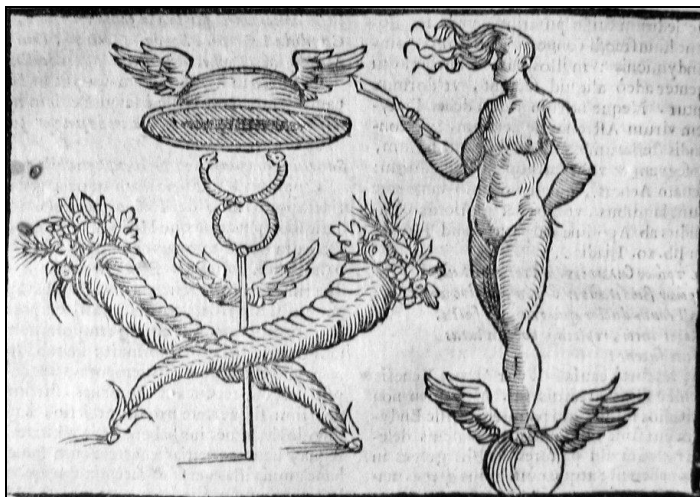


Figure 54 Fortune from the *Mythologia* of Natalis Comes. Fortune is depicted on a ball which can roll any way, with wings which can fly any direction and a lock of hair which must be grasped.

One of the most famous of all French emblem books, Georgette De Montenay's *Emblemes ou Devises Chrestiennes*, Christian Emblems or Devices of 1571 was the first written by a woman, the first Christian emblem book and one of the first illustrated with copper plate engravings. De Montenay was an ardent Protestant and her book suffered the same fate as the other products of the French printing industry after the Council of Trent. Very few of the first edition were sold and the second edition had to be published in Zurich in 1584. Yet there was a 1619 edition of the *Emblemes ou Devises Chrestiennes*, which was a polyglot version in seven languages. This expensive publishing venture is interesting for us in that it reflects not only the increasing use of the vernacular languages for emblem writing but also illustrates that a signifier could have many mean-

¹ See Russell 147 for a detailed description of this motif. Another French manuscript just one year later by George Hoofnagel and dated 1569 was devoted solely to the subject of *Patientia*, Patience.

ings. The different translations in this edition were by no means slavish copies of one another but often completely different interpretations of the motif.¹ The motifs were drawn from widely different sources but the double *subscriptio* was always in the same form; the first part described the picture and the second related it to a Christian moral. De Montenay subsequently wrote another emblem book which was eventually published in English in 1619 as *The Book of Armes or Remembrances*.

The emblem book in France had reached its peak by the third quarter of the 16th Century but the momentum of progress and development of the emblem throughout Europe was unstoppable and in the second half of the 16th century examples of the genre had appeared in Italy, Germany, Holland, Spain, England and to a lesser extent other European countries such as Portugal and Poland. The Dutch in particular embraced the emblem eagerly and gained a reputation for two principal styles: books on the subject of love and those which were illustrated with scenes from everyday life, reflecting a similar interest in the subjects of Dutch painting of the same era.

Holland

There were a number of 15th Century Dutch emblem books such as the *Emblemata* of Johannes Sambucus published in Antwerp in 1564 but the heyday of the Dutch emblem was the first half of the 16th Century. Jakob Cats was the most popular Dutch poet of the day and his *Silenus Alcibiades* of 1618 was his first and most famous work. It had three similar pictures for each emblem with three different interpretations, different mottos and different texts, one for each of amorous, moral and religious themes. The name of the book was intended to illustrate the function of the emblem. A Silenus was a caricature of a bald ugly old man which was commonly found in antiquity. Plato in his *Symposium* compares Socrates with contemporary figurines of Silenus which functioned in the ancient world as a type of gift box. They could be opened and inside were to be found valuables or other surprise gifts. Erasmus, wrote an extensive essay on Silenus comparing Christ and the Church to Silenus - unassuming on the exterior but full of 'wonderful wisdom'.² Cats used it in the

¹ This edition also illustrates another literary practice of the time since it is subtitled *Stammbuch*. A *Stammbuch* or *Albus amicorum* in Latin was a book which was intended to be given as a gift. Such books were often signed by many of the donee's friends together with accompanying messages or compositions on each page.

² Erasmus *Adages* iii, iii, 1. This essay was also published separately by Froben in 1543.

same way as a symbol of the emblem.¹ The subtitle of his book, *Proteus*, a reference to the Sea God who could transform into any desired shape, was a further reference to the subtle implications of his emblems. Cats thus built on the tradition of the erotic emblems of the Dutch school to publicize and instill moral and spiritual lessons. He also wrote several other emblem books including the *Spiegel van den Ouden ende Nieuwem Tijdt*, Mirror of Old and New Times, of 1632 which was immensely popular probably because it contained comic and bawdy material.²

The *Amorum Emblemata* of Otto van Veen (Octavius Vaenius) from 1608 which was first published in four polyglot editions with each emblem translated into three different languages in each edition, was largely derived from Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* or the Art of Love. This, Ovid's second great work, was, like the *Metamorphoses*, extraordinarily influential in Renaissance literature particularly since it was the inspiration of many of Petrarch's and Boccaccio's sonnets which as we have seen in turn inspired the emblem writers. For instance, seven of the twenty-four emblems in *Quaeris quid sit Amor*, What is love, an emblem book published anonymously³ in Holland at the beginning of the 17th Century (1608) are derived from Petrarch's poems. The Dutch writers emphasized the Petrarchan contrast of the simultaneous and inevitable paradox of happiness and pain which is the essence of love although they were able to deal more lightly and humorously with the subject. Perhaps the most attractive of this genre was the *Emblemata Amatoria* by PC Hoofdt from 1611.

Vaenius subsequently wrote a companion book to his *Amorum Emblematum*, the *Amoris Divinis Emblemata*, Emblems of Divine Love, from 1615 which is based on quotations from St. Augustine and represents a turning point in the composition of Dutch emblems, a redirection from descriptions of secular to those of divine love. This was followed by the



Figure 55 An Emblem from the *Pia Desideria* of Hermann Hugo illustrating Psalm 118 'O give thanks unto the Lord'.

¹ See the description of Cats emblems in the Royal Dutch Library at [//www.konbib.nl](http://www.konbib.nl) (2/4/2004).

² See Karel Portman *Emblematica* 8, 2, 1994 243

³ Subsequent editions make clear that the author was Daniel Heinsius a contemporary of Otto Vaenius.

Pia Desideria of Hermann Hugo, possibly the most popular emblem book of the 17th Century which was republished in at least 124 editions. It owed its success to its combination of barely concealed erotic forms as a metaphor for Christian spirituality and love of God together with a full complement of biblical quotations from the Song of Solomon and the Psalms.

Italy, Spain, Germany

Italy was the birth place of the emblem, but Italians seem to have been more interested in the alternative and, to them, more subtle genre, the device. Gabriel Rollenhagen in the introduction to his *Nucleus Emblematum selectissimorum*, A Nucleus of the most select Emblems, of 1611 said that there was no difference between emblems and devices they were two names for the same thing; the emblem was used in northern Europe and the device in the south and accordingly his book was subtitled *quae Itali vulgo Impresas vocant*, 'which Italians call Impresas in the vernacular.' There was a little truth in this although, as we have seen, most contemporaries insisted on a fundamental distinction between the two. According to Paulo Giovio, the acknowledged expert, devices were first introduced into Italy by the French invaders of Milan in 1499 although it is likely that they had existed in the country well before that date. Thus Alciato must have been familiar with the genre and it obviously played a part in the genesis of his conception of the emblem which was to add a general topic to the very specific symbolism of the device. I describe in more detail below (page 286) some of the large number of Italian treatises on devices.

The first vernacular Italian emblem book was published in Lyons in 1549 and was needless to say a short version of Alciato's work. Shortly after in 1555, Achille Bocchi published his *Symbolicae questiones* which was the first emblem book with copperplate engravings. This was cast in the orthodox tripartite form but the emblems were called Symbols and the images and motifs were more in the tradition of the collections of allegorized personifications which found its final form in the work of Ripa. This again seems to be a genre which the Italians favored. Cristoforo Giarda's *Icones Symbolicae* or Symbolic Icons of 1628 was another of these collections of allegories¹ but is categorized as an emblem book and we have already mentioned the collections and expositions of historical and classical symbols by Valeriano in his *Hieroglyphica* of 1576 and Ripa's *Iconologia* first published in 1593. In the 17th century, the Italian trend towards

¹ It is this book that is the subject of E.H. Gombrich's famous essay *Symbolic Icons*.

compilation and theorizing rather than original work continued. A landmark was the vast compilation of thousands of emblems by Picinelli published in 1653 in Latin and Italian as *Mundus Symbolicus* and *Mondo Symbolico-Symbolico*, the Symbolic World. His material was divided into topics which followed his orthodox understanding of the symbolism of the Book of Nature. The same year saw the publication of the *Hieroglyphica* by Fortunio Licetus which illustrated moral and spiritual concepts with images of engraved rings. Also in the first half of the 17th century, Italian writers were preeminent in the burgeoning discussion of new philosophical theories of symbolism which culminated in 1655 with the masterpiece of Emanuele Tesauro, *Il Cannochiale Aristotelico*, The Aristotelian Telescope.

In Spain the era of the emblem coincided with the *Sigla d'oro*, the Golden Age of Spanish literature and the Spanish emblem followed the orthodox form of the northern European countries. There were some seventy Spanish emblem books and nearly all included long commentaries in the fashion set by Minos and others in their commentaries on Alciato. The first Spanish emblem book like the first Italian was an edition of Alciato published in 1549. Many of the subsequent works were entitled collections of *empresas* or devices but these were in fact almost all emblem books since they dealt with general moral or spiritual concepts rather than particular individual ambitions. In many instances the word *Hieroglyphica* was used in the title.

Spanish literature of the time has two characteristics which distinguished it from other European traditions. The influence of Latin poetry was stronger in Spain than elsewhere partly from the heritage of Martial and secondly Spanish writers benefited from the long cultural relationship between Christian and Moorish Spain.¹ These two influences combined to produce what Curtius calls the precious imagery of Spanish poetry which was particularly appropriate for the emblem and a specific contribution from the Moorish tradition was that the *pictura* or image in the Spanish emblem book is called the *cifra* deriving in turn from *sifr* the Arabic word for zero. Originally *cifra* was used for letters which had no meaning such as the letter H the status of which has since classical times always been somewhat unresolved. Was the H just a mode of pronunciation, a breathing, as in Greek or was it a letter in its own right? The word *cifra* was used in this sense at least as early as 1181 in the *Anticlaudianus* by Alain de Lille. Subsequently, *ciphre* developed into a synonym for hieroglyph and was employed throughout Europe as a literary genre akin to the enigma finally developing its modern meaning of a secret code.

¹ Curtius 343



Figure 56 An emblem from Fajardo Saavedra's *Idea de un Principe politico Christiano*.

The most renowned Spanish emblem book and one which had an international readership was Saavedra's *Idea de un Principe politico Christiano*, the Nature of a Christian Prince of 1640¹ which aspired to the political education of princes through emblematics². According to Saavedra, appearance was everything for the political leader, and this princely characteristic was nicely reflected in the dual nature of the emblematic symbol: the signifier and the signified. This was not just a cynical view of the theory and practice of princely behavior in the Machiavellian tradition but a restatement of Platonic doctrine which Saavedra had studied closely and which had also been revalidated for Catholic orthodoxy by the Council of Trent with the doctrine that the temporal leader obtains his authority

only from God. According to Spica, "because it allows the limited human mind to see the platonic theory of ideas, the symbolic image, the basis of all emblematics, finds in the course of the *Idea* its literal and literary vocation and eventually enters the sphere of the Real and the Eternal."³ The whole book and its emblems reflect this truth: that the prince is a mirror of his state and of his authority from God. Saavedra does not concern himself with any Aristotelian theory of emblems or devices; the Scriptures are paramount. "God was its creator. The metal serpent, the burning bush, Gideon's fleece, Samson's lion, the High Priest's vestments, the blandishments of the Spouse, what are they other than devices?"⁴

¹ See Anne-Elizabeth Spica *Emblematica* 1996 10, 1, 85

² The images were cut by one of the best-known woodcut artists Ralph Sadeler who also did the cuts for Drexel's *Zodiacus Christianus* and in fact appeared as the author of the first 1618 edition of this work. One explanation for this is that Drexel wished to keep his name out of the public eye at a time of religious and political upheaval marking the start of the Thirty Years war in Germany.

³ Spica *Emblematica* 1996 10, 1, 86

⁴ Trans. and cited Campa 1999 13

Other emblem books which purported to provide political guidance were the Spaniard, Andreas Mendo's, *Principe Perfetto* of 1642 which was subtitled *Documentos politicos y morales in emblemas*, Political and moral documents in emblems and Ambrogio Marliani's *Theatrum Politicum* of 1631 although this latter had no images and includes examples of adages and inscriptions from monuments. In the English speaking world there was of course the *Basilikon Doron*, written by James I of England for the edification and education of his son Prince Henry.

There were more emblem books printed in Germany than in any other country in Europe although many if not most of these were still printed in Latin which continued to be the language of choice right through the 17th century and beyond. The German writers were particularly prolific in religious emblem books and amongst these were Daniel Cramer (1568-1637) who wrote the earliest collection of religious emblems of the heart and was very close to the Rosicrucians. Hermann Hugo's *Pia Desideria*, Pious Desires, of 1651 was perhaps the most successful emblem book of the 17th century and close behind were the many publications of Jeremiah Drexel particularly his *Zodiacus Christianus* of 1618. We shall refer to these in more detail later.

Michael Maier's *Atlanta Fugiens* from 1617/8 has the reputation of being one of the most accomplished emblem books of all both in terms of technique and content. It consisted of fifty multipart emblems of which the most notable feature was an unique musical composition for each emblem in addition to the motto, picture, and both Latin and German epigrams. Each emblem was a description of a stage in the Great Work of alchemy. It seems that the late 16th and early 17th century was the heyday of the German emblem. We have already referred to the work of Camerarius *Symbolorum & Emblematum Centuria*, a Century of Symbols and Emblems, (first published in 1590). In spite of its title, the final count was four hundred emblems illustrated by the flora and fauna of the time many of which were inspired by a gift to Camerarius of part of his collection by the great polymath Conrad Gesner. A little earlier (1581) Nicholas Reusner published his famous *Emblemata Ethica et Physica* and in 1611 Gabriel Rollenhagen followed with *Nucleus Emblematum selectissimorum*, a Nucleus of the most select Emblems, which he himself reports were only a small fraction of the emblems he had composed.

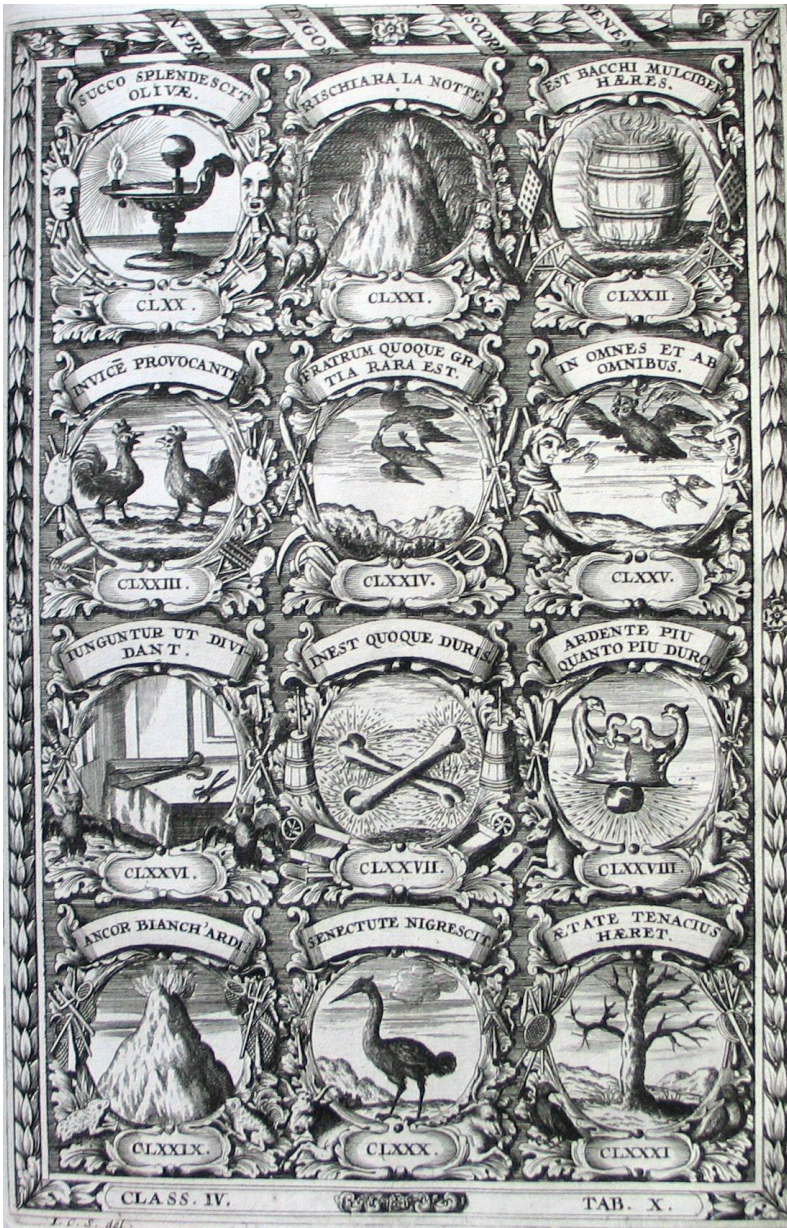


Figure 57 From Boschius' *Symbolographia* of 1702 showing the *picturae* from 12 emblems printed on one page.

The prolific German output continued through the 17th and even into the 18th Century. It is impossible in this brief review to mention more

than a few. The *Nebulo Nebulonum* or Joke of Jokes, by Johann Flitner from 1620 was based on the satirical work from a century earlier, the *Schelmzunft* of Thomas Murner and a particularly interesting publication was J P Harsdörffer *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* Conversations from the Womens Room of 1641-2 a large work of eight volumes describing the social life of the time which describes emblems in various social contexts. It is possible that Harsdörffer also wrote the *Stechbuchlein* an orthodox emblem book under a pseudonym, Fabianus Athyrus.¹ Finally, we can mention what is probably the largest emblem book of all, the *Symbolographia*, of 1701 by the Jesuit Jacobus Boschius which had no less than 2052 emblems and devices.

England

The English were slow in showing their appreciation of emblem books. Those published in English during the 16th Century were mostly translations or adaptations of continental works although by 1700 some 50 English emblem books had been published in over 130 Editions.² This lack of original inspiration by English authors brought scathing observations from commentators both at home and abroad. Le Moyne when referring to the English in his theoretical work on emblems and devices, said, “the Muse has not been present in their island since the time of good King Arthur.”³ Even Henry Peacham, a native emblem writer himself, had serious doubts. “The fault is nether in the Climate, nor as they would have it in the constitution of our bodies, but truly in the cold and frozen aspect of Learning and artes generally amongst us.”⁴ In similar vein, Izaak Walton in his *Life of Hooker* of 1664 wrote that “Clement VIII [Pope 1592-1605] apparently said he had never met with an English book whose writer deserved the name of author.”⁵

The first English emblem book is a manuscript by Thomas Palmer, *Two Hundred Poosees* of 1566. We have already seen that Poosee or Posy was a common contemporary name for a short poem being a pun on Poesy and Posy, a garland of flowers, with its association with the anthology which we have already met. There was also a close association for contemporaries between posy and device. The French dictionary by

¹ Praz suggests that this book may have been the same as the *Openhertighe Hertten* possibly written by Jan van der Velde.

² Bath II, 7

³ Le Moyne 23

⁴ From the introduction to Peacham’s *Minerva Brittana* of 1612 cited by R. Freeman 54

⁵ Carter xxviii

Jehan Palsgrave of 1530 lists the two words as synonymous.¹ Palmer's emblems included some which were adaptations of Alciato and the French writers and others which were verse translations of extracts from Valeriano. A few of his emblems were original.

Then there was *A Theatre for Voluptuous Worldlings* by Van der Noot of 1569. This is categorized as an emblem book but it is more of an illu-



Figure 58 Laura. An illustration from a 1566 commentary on Petrarch's sonnets.

strated book of poetry which was published simultaneously in three languages including English. There seems little question that Edmund Spenser, as a boy of seventeen, anonymously contributed some twenty-six sonnets to this book. Six of these were based on a French translation of Petrarch's famous 323rd Canzone 'Standomi un giorno sola a la fenestre', 'I stood one day alone at the window'. This was a set of apocalyptic visions in which Petrarch laments the loss of his beloved Laura, written in a style which goes back through the meditations of St. Bernard and St. Augustine to the Book of Revelations. It thus illustrated St. Augustine's theme that spiritual knowledge was best acquired through the contemplation of images

a theme which was particularly apt for the emblem genre. Another of Spenser's contributions was a translation of some sonnets by Joachim of Bellay, a French poet who had the reputation of being 'the Ovid of France'.

Several more translations followed. There was the Poet Laureate, Samuel Daniel's translation in 1585 of Paulo Giovio's authoritative book on the theory of devices², a translation of Paradin's *Devises Heroïques* in 1591 and the single copy translation by Thomas Combe in 1593 of la Perrière's *Theater of Fine Devices*. This was published by Field who was also to print Shakespeare's poem *Venus and Adonis*. Even Whitney's book *A Choice of Emblems* of 1586 which is taken by many to be the first original English contribution to the genre was largely derivative of Alciato and other European writers as is made clear by Henry Green's modern pioneering study with his edition published in 1866.

¹ Bath 7

² Giovio 1559

Peacham's *Minerva Britannia* of 1612 was also largely derivative, the theme of the work being based on the *Basilikon Doron* which had been written by King James 1st himself for his son Prince Henry, the emblems being taken from existing books of devices¹ and many of the images coming from the newly published *Iconologia* of Ripa. Minerva was another name for the Goddess Athena who was known as the patron of the theater² and one of the most enduring enigmas of the *Minerva Britannia* is the title page which shows the hand of a concealed person reaching out from behind a curtain and writing on a scroll. 'MENTE.VIDEBOR' or 'In the mind I shall be seen'. This has been shown to be an anagram of 'TIB(I) NOM. DE VERE'³ or 'Thy name is de Vere'. Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, has long been a high level candidate for the real authorship of Shakespeare and Peacham repeats this inference in his subsequent book, *The Compleat Gentleman* in which his list of the notable English poets of the last century omits the name of Shakespeare but includes that of Oxford. This secret reference to Oxford in the *Minerva Britannia* was appropriate for a book intended for Prince Henry who was known to be a particular fan of the works of Shakespeare.

It was not until 1635 that English emblem writing finally came into its own with the *Emblemes* of George Wither and Francis Quarles' book of the same title. Wither's is interesting from several aspects. It was also largely devoted to the King and Queen, flattering them, advising them and even petitioning them. It was divided into 4 sections of 50 emblems each which are specifically stated to represent the four sides of a building, which could be a theater or structure for memorization and as we have already seen a principal theme of the book was the vagaries of fate and fortune (page 203). The title page was a representation of the Tablet of Cebes showing pilgrims picking lots out of the urn of fortune and on the last page of the book is a lottery dial which was to be used to predict the future. Wither's ability as a poet was no better than the rest of most of the English emblematisers. At least he recognized his own failings since he apparently said that if he had been wealthy, he might not have done any writing at all. There were some who might have said that that would have been a good thing and an amusing story is told of one John Denham, a poet, who after Wither was captured by the Royalists during the English

¹ Typotius 1601-3 being the principal source.

² One of Minerva's standard accoutrements was her spear which she would often shake in rage!

³ Turner 1937. The controversy over the anagram continues to this day. See Roger Strittmatter 2000 2 or at <http://www.shakespearefellowship.org/virtualclassroom> (2/4/2004). The missing I in the anagram is of course in the mind.

Civil War, is said to have petitioned King Charles to spare Wither's life "for while G.W. [Wither] lived he [Denham] should not be the worst poet in England."¹

With Francis Quarles, we come finally to the most famous of English emblem writers and deservedly so. His two books *Emblemes* first published in 1635 and *Hieroglyphiques of the Life of Man* of 1638 which thereafter were usually published together went through about sixty Editions of which about twenty were in the 19th Century. It was based on two Catholic publications, the *Pia Desideria* of Hermann Hugo of 1624 and the *Typus Mundi* produced by Jesuit students from Antwerp in 1627 and it was unusual in that the text and to a large extent the pictures remained unchanged throughout its publishing history.² Quarles was a better poet than his predecessors and his emblems were mostly original which certainly could not be said of the earlier writers. Quarles' book became extremely popular, in spite of its morbid theme which was a meditation on mortality, symbolized by the passing and the renewal of the seasons. The first combined edition of his two books from 1639/1640 had a run of 5,000 copies, an exceptionally large number for those days.

Quarles' book and its subsequent editions represented the high point of the English emblem. John Bunyan had a try at the genre, publishing in 1686 his *A Book for Boys and Girls*, the title of which in subsequent editions was changed to *Divine Emblems*. But this was hardly recognizable as an emblem book being a series of rather poor didactic poems without mottoes or pictures until later editions when the name was changed and it had very little to do with children except as an excuse for the simplistic nature of the poetry. Although there were at least twenty original English emblem books after 1700 beyond Quarles and many reissues of earlier editions, as Bath says, "the history of the emblem in eighteenth century England is to a large extent the story of its marginalization"³ and Rosemary Freeman is even more curt. "After 1700 the world ceased to have any use for emblem books as such."

During the 18th Century in England emblems were used in political pamphlets and posters which gradually deteriorated into satire and in later years particularly during the 19th Century there were a number of English emblem books mostly directed at children. As I have already

¹ R. Freeman 141

² Karl Josef Holtgen *Emblematica* 10, 1, 1996 108

³ Bath 1994 264

mentioned, the last¹ original emblem book of the 19th century was even published by a child. Lloyd Osborne, the stepson of Robert Louis Stevenson, the famous author and novelist, concerned about the desperate state of the family's finances, used a toy printing press to publish leaflets and menus and ultimately the *Moral Emblems*. Stevenson wrote the poems for the book and also carved the accompanying woodcuts. The book, written in Switzerland in 1882 and first published in the United States in 1921, continued to reflect Stevenson's lifelong and bitter cynicism of middle class material values.

Industrious pirate! See him sweep
 The lonely bosom of the deep,
 And daily the horizon scan
 From Hatteras or Matapan.
 Be sure, before that pirate's old,
 He will have made a pot of gold,
 And will retire from all his labours
 And be respected by his neighbours.
*You also scan your life's horizon
 For all that you can clap your eyes on.*



Figure 59 From the *Moral Emblems* of Robert Louis Stevenson.

The sense of eclectic philosophical inquiry which characterized the early emblem books had been abandoned by the 19th century to be replaced by exhortations of orthodox Christian morality and this was reflected in their titles many of which were just called Moral Emblems. Thus the first English translation of Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* of 1709 was the *Moral Emblems*. The original English emblem book *Hermathenae* by Francis Tolson of 1740 was advertised in its subscription as a book of Moral Emblems and even reprints of earlier titles took the same name. The *Moral Emblems* of Cats and Farley from 1860 was a splendid combined production of the emblems of Cats, the Dutch writer, and those of Robert Farley, the Scotsman, from his *Lychnocausia* or Light's moral emblems of 1638.² This late version of two distinguished works nevertheless

¹ A French book *Les Coeurs ...* of 1894 by Pontsevrez (a pseudonym for Paul Dupont) was a reissue of the original copperplates from a 17th Century Dutch Emblem book *Openhartigt Herte*, Openhearted Hearts with new verses.

² He published a second emblem book the *Kalendarium Humanae Vitae*, the Calendar of Man's Life in the same year.

represents one of the high points of the publishing history of emblems. The layout and the quality of the printing and engraving are superb.

The 20th century has seen a renaissance of the emblem genre which appears to be accelerating. M.C. Escher did the cuts for a volume of twenty-four emblems in 1932 and Edward Lucie-Smith, the art critic, published *Borrowed Emblems* in 1967, the borrowing being from *Les Vrais Pourtraits Des Hommes Illustres*, the True Portraits of Illustrious Men by Théodore de Bèze of 1581.¹ In the last twenty-five years there have been at least five emblem books published in English in addition to several scholarly exhibits on the subject.

• Religious Emblem Books •

We have already touched on the beginnings of religious emblem books. We saw that the first Protestant emblem book was the *Emblemes ou Devises Chrestiennes* by Georgette de Montenay published in 1571. The Catholics were not going to be outdone and the same year saw the first Catholic emblem book *Humanis salutis Monumenta*, Monuments of Human Salvation, by Montanus Arias. Thereafter both sides embraced the genre as a vehicle to propagate their distinct versions of Christianity. Indeed it can be said that a principal reason for the continued success of the emblem genre after its initial flowering in the 16th Century was that it was adopted as a weapon in the religious wars of the Counter Reformation particularly, on the Catholic side, by the Society of Jesus.

There was already a strong Catholic tradition in the late Middle Ages of devotional and meditational literature. The most revered and influential of them all was the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis (c1379-1471) completed in 1441. It is said that there were about 80 editions of this work printed before 1500 and that there have been a grand total of more than 3,000 editions making it one of the most popular books in Western literature. Earlier, St. Bonaventure (1221-1274) a contemporary and intellectual equal of Thomas Aquinas had laid down in his *De Triplici Via*, on the Threepart Way, a framework for private Christian meditation. He proposed three types of meditation, the *Via Purgativa*, the *Via Illuminativa* and the *Via Unitiva*, or the purgative way, the way of illumination and the way of unity.

¹ This was a translation of the original Latin edition *Icones verae imagines virorum illustrium* from the previous year.

St. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) who founded the Society of Jesus or the Jesuits in 1540 also wrote a book, *Exercitia Spiritualis*, Spiritual Exercises, on how to meditate. In this, his masterpiece, he relied on the teaching of St. Augustine who had separated the soul into three parts, memory, understanding and will each of which should be nourished and directed into contemplation of the mystical journey to salvation. Loyola may also have obtained inspiration from the *Scala Meditationis*, Steps of Meditation, by Gansford, written in the early 14th Century which recommended six steps in the meditative process, two for each of the three parts of the soul.¹ Loyola was also influenced by Llull's *Art of Contemplation* and his methods were reinforced by the similar steps required in orthodox Rhetoric for proper composition. In pursuit of their didactic aims and following the *Decree on sacred Images* promulgated by the Council of Trent of 1563 which emphasized the importance of the image as a teaching tool, even at the expense of the written word, the Jesuits began publishing illustrated books of spiritual truths and moral exhortations of which a principal example was Louis de Richeome's, *Tableaux sacrez*, Sacred Pictures, of 1601. The pictures in this book were specifically identified with hieroglyphs and thus explicitly denominated as embodying the truths they represented.² From these beginnings, it was a small step to the emblem which the Jesuits thenceforward adopted as their own. Some 1,700 Jesuit emblem books have been identified.³ There were books illustrating the lives of the Saints, for instance *La Vie symbolique du bienheureux François de Sales*, the Symbolic Life of the happy François de Sales, by Gambart, the life of the Virgin Mary, such as the *Vitae Beatae Mariae* by Callot, books of monastic rules, hymnals, prayer books and aids to sermons.⁴ Their output was endless and we can note that many of them are to be found in small formats, 16^{mo} or 24^{mo}, obviously designed to be slipped into the pocket where they could be available for meditative and devotional purposes in the reader's idle moments.

The emblem became a central part of the armory of the Jesuits and emblem composition was a standard element of Jesuit teaching. It formed an essential part of the Curriculum of Studies for the Jesuits, the *Ratio Studiorum* of 1599, in which students were specifically encouraged to compose inscriptions and emblems and make and solve enigmas.⁵ In 1640 the Jesuits chose to celebrate the centenary of their foundation by

¹ See Rodter 1992 reviewed by G. Richard Dimler in *Emblematica* 7, 1, 1993 173

² Bath 1994 252

³ See the catalogue by G. Richard Dimler *Emblematica* 2, 1, 1987 139

⁴ Clements 101

⁵ Cited G. Richard Dimler *Emblematica* 6, 2, 1992 285

publishing a book of Devices, *Imago primi saeculi Soc. Jesu*, a Picture of the first century of the Society of Jesus, which was published by Plantin. There are also a great many anonymous emblem books published by individual Jesuit colleges particularly those from Germany. We have seen that the most popular emblem book of the 17th Century was the *Pia Desideria*, Pious Desires by Hermann Hugo from 1624. He was a Jesuit as was Antoine Sucquet whose *Via Vitae Aeternae*, The Way of Eternal Life (1620) was also intended for meditation. The English Catholics were able to enjoy *Parthenia Sacra or the Mysterious and Delicious Garden of the Sacred Parthenes* of 1633 by HA, thought to be Henry Hawkins, which consisted of a series of symbols intended to encourage meditation and greater understanding of the Virgin Mary, each containing eight parts including two pictures called the Device and the Emblem. This is arguably the most sophisticated of all the English emblem books on several levels including the representation within each emblem of the four modes of spiritual interpretation.

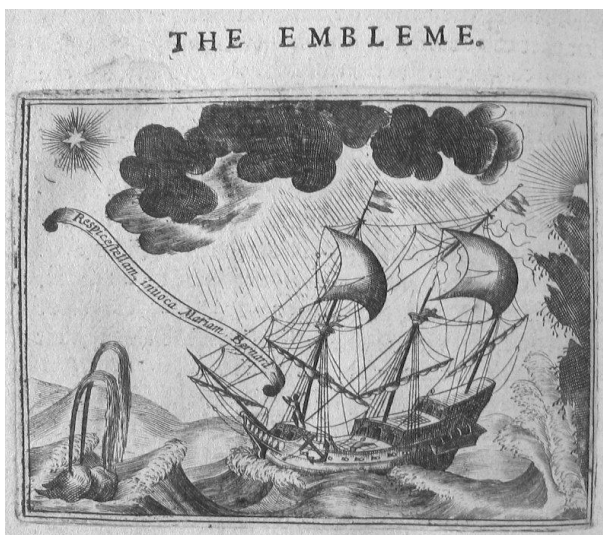


Figure 60 The embleme from the Symbol 'The Starre' from the *Parthenia Sacra*.

The most popular English emblem book, Quarles *Emblemes* of 1635 was a Protestant devotional book although this was actually based on earlier Jesuit works including the *Pia Desideria* again and also *Typus Mundi* by Philip de Mallery itself based on the *Pia*. It was typical of many English translations of Jesuit originals; they aimed at transforming the Catholic symbolism inherent in the originals into a form acceptable to the Protestant readership.

One frequently employed motif for the religious emblem was that of the lighted candle which could obviously symbolize light and dark, good and evil or the light that was imparted from the grace of God. We can refer to just one example the *Lychnocausia* by the Scotsman Robert Farlie of 1638. And another motif in these hundreds of Jesuit works, perhaps the most popular of all, was that of the heart. Heart emblems were part of an old tradition originating with the teaching of St. Augustine who

made the heart a central symbol in his *Confessions* a work which begins by stating: “thou has made us for thyself and our heart is restless until it confides in thee.”¹ Augustine, in turn, could rely on the Old Testament where it is said “a new heart also will I give you and a new spirit will I put into you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and give you a new heart of flesh.”²

The first part of this extract was traditionally regarded as a type for the coming of Christ and the second the source of many of the heart emblems which depicted a heart being hammered or carved so as to soften and prepare it for receipt of the divine grace. The symbolism of the heart also shows a typical conflation of Christian and pagan traditions. Some emblems show a stony heart being split by what appears to be bolts of lightning. What is this? Nowhere in the Scriptures is lightning mentioned in such a context but this time the symbolism goes back to the Greek myths and the thunderbolts of Zeus which could split the hardest rock. The hand of God³ holding thunderbolts is thus a common image in these emblems. The *topos* was widened even further by conflation of stone and flint, the latter with its two meanings, as something hard and as the source of fire or spark. In some emblems the direction of the lightning is reversed. The heart as hard as flint is the source of the spark illustrating how the divine fire has filled the human heart. In the emblem book, the *Imago Primi Saeculi*, Image of the First Century, issued by the Society of Jesus in 1640 to commemorate their first centennial, the divine spark is illustrated thus. This Gnostic concept provides the rationale behind the impresa of the Accademia degli Occulti of Brescia which illustrated “the alertness and purity of that divine particle which blessed God has hidden in our bodies in the guise of a spark of fire.”⁴ Steven Bann in his commentary on the emblem by Ian Hamilton Finlay, *Hinc Clarior*, Hence Brighter, sums it up in grandiloquent tones: “the flintstonereveals by its flashes of mica, the destiny of all sublunary matter, to act as a theophany, leading men towards the eternal unclouded being.”⁵

¹ Augustine *Confessions* 1, 1 translated by K.J. Holtgen in *Emblematica* 4, 2, 1989 281

² *Ezekiel* 36, 26

³ We have already seen how an early Christian tradition forbade the depiction of the face of God the Father but His hand was an acceptable substitute. See page 33.

⁴ Trans. and cited Caldwell 93

⁵ Finlay 21

Daniel Cramer (1568-1637), a German theologian and historian, wrote the earliest collection of religious emblems of the heart. He had already published the *Rosicrucian Emblems*, in 1617, a book of forty mostly heart emblems which had close ties to the new Rosicrucian mystery cult (page 82). His most successful emblem publication however was the *Emblemata Sacra*, Sacred Emblems, from 1624. Cramer was a Lutheran and this emblem book was based on the dogma of three of the twelve articles of the *Concordien-formel*, the Lutheran Creed of 1577-1580, namely predestination, justification and the order of salvation.¹



Figure 61 Emblem 36 from Johann Kraus' *Heilige Augen and Gemuths Lust* of 1706 with a superb plate illustrating Christ comforting the eleven disciples before he enters the Garden of Gethsemane. (John xvi, v)

Another, perhaps the most popular of the genre, was the *Schola Cordis* or School of the Heart of 1629 by the Dutch author van Haeften. This was based partly on De Montenay and partly on Cramer's work. An English version of *Schola Cordis* was produced by Christopher Harvey in 1647, a book in which some of the accompanying subscriptions are figure poems. A heart emblem book also has the distinction of being the most recent French emblematic publication, *Les Coeurs*, the Hearts, published

¹ Modersheim, Sabine *Domina Doctrina Coronat....* Mikrokosmos 1994 reviewed in by K. J.Holtgen in *Emblematica* 10, 1, 1996 158

in 1894. It was not however original but a reprint of the plates from an earlier Dutch book, *Openhartighe herten*, the Openhearted Heart of 1618-1627 with new verses.¹ Finally, the scene from John Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress* where Jesus is to be found sweeping out the human heart is taken from a similar scene in the emblem book of Antonius Wiericx, *Cor Iesu amanti sacrum*, the Sacred Heart of the loving Jesus, which depicts a progression of heart emblems in which Jesus takes possession of and cleanses the human heart.²

• The Device •

We have already noted that contemporaries treated devices as a genre distinct from emblems although today they are included in most discussions on the emblem literature and they are to be found in modern emblem bibliographies. To appreciate the distinction, we have to remember that in the late Renaissance the observer was surrounded by devices; they were displayed on shields, badges, buildings and in many other locales, all exhibiting the symbol and motto of their owner. Books of devices were in nearly all cases descriptive of existing devices and in addition to the image and motto included an exposition of the origins of the individual entry and how it met the criteria required of the genre. Many books of devices were theoretical treatises on the nature of the device illustrated by examples and since the device was according to contemporaries, the supreme expression of the Renaissance symbol, they tried to expound the theoretical nature of the sign itself. The emblem was an intellectual jeu d'esprit pointing a moral or spiritual truth which was of general application rather than one with a connection to any single individual. In contrast to the device, it was primarily a literary phenomenon which might then appear in decorative contexts. In such cases, the decorative emblem was often initially copied from an emblem book and when it formed part of the decoration for a theatrical or other festive occasion was only of a temporary nature. Le Moyne comparing the device and the emblem wrote that "there is nothing that is common between them, not in their content, their form or their purpose."³

The Italian for device was *Impresa* from the Latin *impredere*, to undertake, implying that it was intended to depict some undertaking, action or

¹ Mark Van Vaeck *Emblematica* 8, 2, 1994 286

² Clements 19

³ Le Moyne Bk V Ch. V 220

ambition of the holder of the device. Ariosto uses the word *impresa*, meaning feats or undertakings, in the opening lines of his great epic, *Orlando Furioso*, written in about 1505, when he is summarizing the subject matter of his poem. To Scipioni Bargagli the device was “an amassing or connexion of figures and words so strictly united together, that being considered apart, they cannot explicate themselves directly, the one without the other.”¹ And in a wider context, emphasizing the primacy of the image, according to Gombrich the device was “a free floating metaphor; a formula on which we can meditate. Somehow such an image reveals an aspect of the structure of the world which would seem to elude the ordered progress of dialectic argument.”²

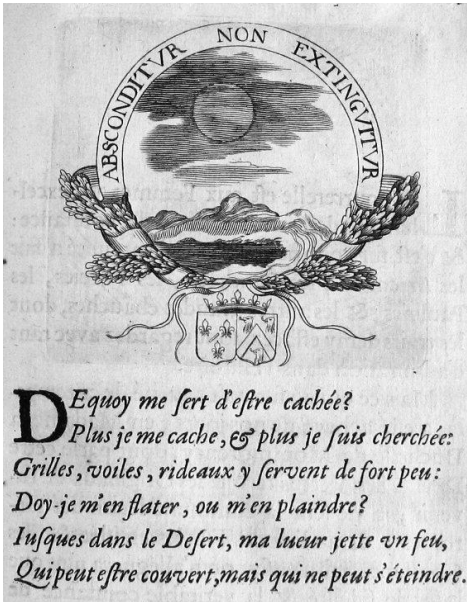


Figure 62 From le Moynes *De L'art des Devises* showing both the device and the armorial bearings of a royal princess.

The *impresa* was obviously originally based on the heraldic coats of arms which had been worn by medieval knights to identify themselves and their retainers in battle. The device however was to be distinguished from coats of arms; there were different rules for each genre. Apart from other differences, the device was not heritable; every member of a family was allowed a different device which reflected his or her own ambitions. In Pierre Le Moynes's treatise on the subject *De l'Art des Devises*, in addition to laying out the detailed rules for the devise, he includes for illustration four collections of devices. In one of these, the *Cabinet de devises*, he gives for some entries in the collection both the device and the coat of arms of the individual to whom it is dedicated.

It can also be noted that these collections look more like emblems than devices since each device has four or five elements including a *subscriptio* and a commentary.

European heraldry had originated in the first half of the 12th Century when knights, to identify themselves in tournament and battle, began to put devices on their shields and their surcoats, the latter being worn to

¹ Estienne 1645 trans. Blount 1646

² Gombrich 165

protect the armor against heat and moisture. The devices themselves were in turn mostly derived from engraved rings or seals which identified and authenticated the correspondence of their knightly owners. Since no identifying armorial symbols are shown in the celebrated Bayeux Tapestry dating from 1077, we know that they cannot have been in use before that date. Menestrier, the emblem theorist, says that he had seen a tomb in St. Gall which displayed the arms of the occupant dating to 1010 but subsequent research has indicated that the tomb was altered and the arms were added at a later date. Such evidence as exists suggests that coats of arms were not employed in the first Crusade in 1095 but that they originated in Europe between 1135 and 1155. Possibly the first person to be granted a coat of arms was Geoffrey of Anjou, son in law of Henry 1 of England, and this was in about 1127. Certainly at the time of the Third Crusade (1199-1203) they were in widespread use and by 1300, something like fifteen hundred different coats of arms could be found in England alone. Almost every one of these and those from the other countries of Europe were symbolic of a characteristic of their bearer or his forefathers or of some incident in the family history.¹

To explore the origin of the genre we can go back even further in time. There was a long tradition in classical times of warriors wearing symbolic marks to identify themselves. There are frequent references in Greek and Roman literature to such insignia, the descriptions of which could easily be mistaken for entries in a book of devices from the 16th Century. Herodotus claimed that the origin of the tradition lay with the Carians, a mythical race associated with Atlantis and the far shores of the Atlantic Ocean. Homer describes Vulcan making the shield for Achilles. Hesiod describes a shield made for Hercules. Aeschylus in his play *Seven against Thebes* relates in detail the devices on the shields of each of the seven heroes who are investing the city. Polyneices, for instance, has a double device, a warrior leading a female figure, the personification of Justice, a symbol of his hopes for the city after it had been taken.²

Even the early Israelites appear to have had individual standards to identify themselves. The Old Testament tells us that "every man of the Children of Israel shall pitch by his own standard, with the ensign of their father's house."³ Indeed, many authors of books of emblems and

¹ One poignant and famous example is the heart in the arms of Sir William Douglas which was to commemorate the romantic promise he made to his dying master King Robert Bruce of Scotland to take the latter's heart to Jerusalem. This promise was never fulfilled. Wagner 12

² Fox-Davies 6 gives further examples from Aeschylus, Herodotus, Virgil and Tacitus.

³ *Numbers* II, 2

devices particularly those with religious or meditative purposes were convinced that they had scriptural authority for their work. Joseph Hall wrote a treatise on emblem theory in 1621 called *The Imprese of God*. See, he said, “the ancient use of heraldry in the scriptures, that part especially which concerns Inscriptions; as on coyns, shields, ensigns.”



Figure 63 *Cominus et eminus*. The porcupine device of the King of France from Giovio's *Dell' Impresi Militari e Amoroze* of 1555.

According to Paulo Giovio (1483-1552), who wrote an influential handbook on the genre the *Dialogo dell'Impresi Militari et Amoroze*, Treatise on Military and Amorous Devices in 1551,¹ devices were introduced into Italy by the leaders and officers of the French army on the invasion of Milan by France in 1499 an invasion which was ordered by the French king both for political reasons and because he was attracted by the relative richness and brilliance of Italian society. It succeeded to the extent that during the 16th century Italian culture was introduced into France on a large scale. By the middle of the century the construction of devices for

¹ The first edition had no images. The second edition of 1555 was the first illustrated edition and the book was seen to be sufficiently important that immediately thereafter further competing editions were published with commentary by Ruscelli and Domenichini.

illustrious personages and collections and interpretations of the devices of both ancient and contemporary secular and ecclesiastical nobility had become an extensive and serious literary and cultural phenomenon in both countries.

As we have seen, by contrast with the emblem, the device only had two elements, the picture and the motto. There was also, however, a third element in the concept of the device which might assist with the interpretation of the underlying conceit and this was the holder of the device. Since the device was personal to one individual, knowledge of the personality, achievements or ambition of this individual might easily provide clues. Nevertheless owing to the greater simplicity of the genre and thus the greater difficulty in interpreting the symbolism, the device was regarded by many contemporaries as a form superior to the emblem. Pierre le Moyne took the orthodox mystical and symbolic view. "I should say that there is in the device something of those universal images given to the higher spirits."¹ And other authors also found in the genre the mystical origins which we have already reviewed. For instance, Alessandro Farra saw the device as an image which contained elements of the actual Platonic ideas and which thus could assist in the progress of the soul to unity with God. The device also, according to him, had its origins in "the Cabala of the Hebrews, the sacred writing of the Egyptians, the mysteries contained in the fables of Orpheus's theology and the numbers and symbols of Pythagoras."² According to Malherbe, the 17th Century French poet, even if we accept a little poetic license, "making a good device was the work of an entire lifetime."³

Giovio was the recognized expert in the genre to the extent that he was asked to create a device for the King of France, Henri II, on his accession to the throne. In his book, Giovio laid down five parameters for a good device: that there should be proper proportion between motto and device, that the idea should not be too obscure, that the picture should be memorable, that no human figure should be represented and that the form of the motto⁴ should be drawn according to additional carefully circumscribed rules: they should be in a different language and

¹ Le Moyne 1666 11

² Farra 270 trans. and cited D. Caldwell *Emblematica* 11, 122. The first edition was in 1571 but the quotation is taken from the 1594 edition.

³ Cited le Moyne 35

⁴ De Bustamante 1992 gives the origin of some 20,000 mottos which form part of devices and emblems. He comments that a large number of these derive from the works of Virgil and perhaps are evidence of the popularity of the *Sortes Virgiliana*, the Virgilian Fates.

ideally not consist of more than four words. Estienne says however that the rule on the foreign language could be relaxed in less serious contexts where devices were to be used in tournaments, for the skirmishes of love, in masques or comedies.¹ The motto in the device was typically printed as part of the image unlike the emblem where it was set in type above the picture. A further requirement for the device, according to Tommaso Garzoni, was that although it was intended to be obscure, it should have only one possible interpretation. However, one of the attractions of the genre was that subsequent commentators could take pleasure and demonstrate their erudition in offering multiple interpretations of a single example.²

These parameters seem unexceptional but such was the enthusiasm with which the field was pursued that there was much debate over their validity. Many other theorists including Girolamo Ruscelli who wrote a *Discorso* or Discussion as an introduction for Giovio's book as well as his own book of devices, *Le imprese illustre*, Famous Devices, of 1566 disagreed with several of them. Nevertheless Giovio has come down as the accepted authority on rules and parameters for the genre although he was known to have said that he had never made a device with which he was entirely satisfied. The device was distinguished from the emblem by these authorities particularly in its purpose. The emblem was intended to illustrate a moral, spiritual or philosophical lesson which was universally applicable whereas the device portrayed the personal beliefs, character or ambitions of a single individual. The distinction is emphasized by Camden in his *Remaines concerning Britain* (1605): "a device is a picture with his motte or word borne by a noble and learned personage to notify some particular conceit of their own; as Emblemes (that we may omit other differences) propound some general instruction to us all."

Camden also emphasized the close interrelationship of the two parts of the device as like that between body and soul, a metaphor that was a favorite for contemporary commentators although not universally accepted. It implied the superiority of words over images which those writers with a Platonist inclination found difficult to accept. Camden said: "a correspondence of the picture which is as the Bodie and the Motte which as the soule giveth life". Jakob Masen the Jesuit writer said the same. "The device is composed of words and figures, the figures are the body and the words the soul."³

¹ Estienne 1645 trans. Blount 1646 27

² Garzoni 98 cited by Dietmar Peil *Emblematica* 6, 2, 1992 281 note 49

³ Cited by G. Richard Dimler *Emblematica*, 6, 2, 1992 283

This figure of body and soul was expanded by more sophisticated theorists such as Ammirato, Ruscelli, Menestrier and Tesauro to illustrate a comprehensive theory of signs. For them, on one level, the Body comprised the whole device, both figure and motto, and the Soul signified the idea illustrated by the whole ensemble. As a further corollary, their expositions of the nature of the device were used to illustrate the distinction between body and soul according to Christian theology as expounded by Aquinas, and to demonstrate the means of communication between the two which according to them could only be effected through the medium of images.¹ If nothing else, this exploration of the concept of the soul as intimately involved in the creative process enabled theorists to identify with the orthodox and ancient view that poetry was divinely inspired.

Puttenham, the English theorist, on the other hand, proposed in his *Art of English Poesie* that the word device was the genus of all these literary forms and he professed that he could see no distinction between devices and similar members of the genre.

Devices, a terme which includes in his generality all those other, viz liveries, cognizances, emblemes, enseignes and impreses...the use and intent is but one ...and that is to insuniat [insinuate] some secret wittie morall and brave purpose, either to recreate his eye, or please his phantasie, or examine his judgement or occupie his braine.²

Giovio indicated that the subtle meaning of the device must be difficult to interpret so that the solution of the symbolism would bring pleasurable gratification to the onlooker; it must bring 'wonder' to the mind of the reader, a literary objective which had first been suggested in such terms by Aristotle. Some thought that Giovio was not sufficiently precise in his definitions. Alessandro Farra in 1571³ proposed twenty two essential criteria for a successful device and Emanuele Tesauro in his famous work on metaphor proposed no less than thirty-one, those of Giovio plus many others including that it should be heroic, poetical, witty and above all decorous.⁴

The device was thus one more of the symbolic mechanisms which we have been examining designed to provide glimpses of moral and spiritual

¹ For a further discussion of this aspect of Body and Soul in the Device see Loach *Emblematica* 12, 31

² Puttenham 89

³ Farra 1571 taken from the final section *Filosofia simbolica overo delle Imprese*.

⁴ Tesauro Chapter XV. This number was up from his earlier manuscript treatise *Idea delle Perfette Imprese* written in the 1620s which set out only 16 essential elements in the *impresa*.

truths which reason alone cannot elucidate. Thus Tesauro: “hence arise the delights which the ‘Imprese’ give us, because a thing called by its proper name does not teach us anything but itself, but calling by a metaphor teaches us two things at the same time, one within the other.”

Estienne also emphasized the importance to the concept of the device of metaphor or comparison.¹ This was the rationale behind the rule that a figure in the device should not be human. How could you make a comparison with two similar things: a human figure in the device and the person to whom reference was being made? Such a reference could not possibly meet the metaphorical criterion of being marvelous. Estienne emphasizes again the central purpose of metaphor in the device when discussing the role of the motto: “the motto serveth for no other thing but for a minister, interpreter or necessary instrument to bring the Comparison.” By contrast, Estienne approved as suitably astounding the theoretical device which showed the picture of a yoke and a motto with the solitary word *Suave* (Sweet). The reference is to the words of Christ ‘My yoke is sweet’;² not so obvious a device unless you are very familiar with the New Testament but when the reference is revealed, a symbolic trope with many marvelous overtones.

Giovio’s book which outlined the rules for the genre was first published in 1551 the same year as the first book of devices. This was *Devises Heroiques*, Heroic Devices, of 1551 by Claude Paradin with cuts by Bernard Salomon who was universally known as ‘*Le Petit Bernard*’, Little Bernard, and who was one of the most celebrated of book illustrators of the time. It may seem odd that a theoretical book on the subject should be published at the same time as the first collection but it merely confirms that the device had been around for a long time. Caldwell cites references to devices in two letters of Pietro Bembo dated 1500 and 1510³ and other evidence shows the existence of devices in Italy well before 1499 when according to Giovio they were imported from France.

For some, however, an earlier publication, the collection of love lyrics in the style of Petrarch, by Maurice Scève called *Délie* or Delight was the first printed collection of devices. *Délie* was clearly pioneering. There was only one illustrated device for each ten lyrics which were called epigrams. It was more a book of poems than devices and as Praz points out the poetry was as distinguished as any in the emblem genre. And according to contemporaries, the device, of military origin, was also appropriate for

¹ Estienne 1645 trans. Blount 1646 46

² *Matthew* 11, 30

³ Dorigen Caldwell *Emblematica* 11, 9

declarations of love since these were no more than the opening salvos in the battle of the sexes. But it was the Italians who were preeminent in the theory of and the publication of collections of devices. Giovanni Ferro in his *Teatro d'Imprese* lists no less than fifty-two authors of such collections.¹ We can mention particularly Gabriele Simeoni's *Le sententioze imprese*, Meaningful Devices, of 1560, Girolamo Ruscelli's *Le imprese illustri*, Famous Devices, of 1566 and Scipione Bargagli's *Dell'imprese*, Devices, (1578). These mostly took the format of the illustration and a prose interpretation describing how it was relevant to the personage to whom it belonged and explaining the origin of the conceit. The theoretical discussions in these collections often took the format of a dialogue between well-known experts in the field emulating the Platonic dialogues and the mechanisms of dialectics. One example of these was the poet, Torquato Tasso's, *Dialogo del'Imprese* which especially emphasized the Platonic traditions in the creation of devices and, following Pseudo-Dionysius, featured the grotesque or unlike metaphor as appropriate to depict the nature of God.

The fashion for creating devices for almost any occasion was widespread and one practical use for them was the tournament device. Jousting and tournaments were a popular sport and spectacle in the 16th Century especially in England. At these tournaments it became fashionable and then traditional for the participants to carry a shield decorated with a device prepared specially for the occasion and these were of course judged for their subtlety and for their suitability for the character or prowess of the bearer. In the case of tournaments at the Palace of Whitehall in London, it became the tradition to present these devices to the Queen after the tournament and as from about 1580 they were put on display in the Palace where they could be viewed by tourists on payment of a fee.²

The military aspect of both device and emblem was emphasized by the frequent motif of the pen and the sword appearing together which meshed nicely with the concept of the rounded Renaissance man, the courtier who was as adept at warfare as at literature and this naturally resonated with the use of devices which were principally the province of the nobility. Of the two, the pen and the sword, the emblem writers of

¹ See Laurens 2000 1971

² Alan R.Young *Emblematica* 3, 1, 1988 67 and his *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments* London 1987.

course emphasized the former and frequently quoted the maxim of Cicero, *Cedunt arma literis*, Arms give way to letters.¹

In fact, it was the use of devices in the literary societies or academies of Italy in the 16th Century that was one of the principal reasons for their popularity.² The Platonic Academy of Florence founded by Ficino was not unique; on the contrary, every city in Italy had at least one academy and often several. The academies were meeting places and dining clubs, where lectures and poetry readings were given and literary and intellectual debates and discussions took place. Many commentators, who naturally were also members themselves, viewed the institution of the academies with almost mystical reverence. The intellectual life of the academy was for them an aspect of the path of virtue which led to the Platonic perfection of the soul. Indeed as Bargagli put it: “nature, considered in terms of the whole body of the universe...almost is and demonstrates herself to be none other than a proper academy.”³

Each academy had its own device and in many cases every member took a device which was related in some way to the device of the academy and the creation of all these symbols was one of the intellectual and recreational occupations of the academicians, a demonstration of the wit and virtue of owner of the device and of the academy itself. The rise in importance of the academies thus reflected, or maybe caused, the trend during the 16th Century, away from the device as a military and aristocratic conceit to one where it was primarily an intellectual and philosophical pursuit.

Erasmus, himself had a device displayed on his ring which we can go into in some detail since it is typical of the subtleties which were so admired by contemporaries. The ring showed a youth with flying hair on a block on which was inscribed Erasmus' motto *Nulli Cedo* or I yield to noone. This device gave him no end of trouble and he must finally have regretted his choice. His friends complained that it demonstrated a basic arrogance in his character and his enemies made comparisons with Luther's signature remark “Here I stand, I can do no other” although Erasmus never supported the extreme positions and actions taken by Luther.

¹ See the examples given in Clements Chapter VII, 136

² Dorigen Caldwell *Emblematica* 11, 73 et seq. describes the Italian academies in detail.

³ Scipione Bargagli *Delle Imprese* 1594 trans. and cited Caldwell 91. This was the first full edition of Bargagli's work. The edition of 1578 only had the 'first part' of his device book.

Erasmus explained and excused his choice of motto by saying that it was not he that was speaking but Death himself; the ring was to remind him, Erasmus, of the certainty of his fate. But this explanation was deemed suspect since it did not explain the youth with the flying hair. A fuller interpretation has been given¹ but it still does not unambiguously show whether or not Erasmus' friends were right. The block refers to *Terminus*, the Roman god of boundaries; the block is a boundary stone. *Terminus* was famous amongst the gods for one reason; he alone refused to obey Zeus when the latter cleared out all the other Gods from the Roman Capitol. *Terminus* was later joined by *Juventus* or Youth, illustrated by flying hair, and the two together came to symbolize eternity. In this context, it is difficult to accept Erasmus' contention that the device was to remind him of death since the image seems to mean the exact opposite but nevertheless the interpretation stuck, became widespread and was quickly taken up by the emblem writers including Alciato, Paradin and Giovio.²



Figure 64 The Roman god *Terminus* depicted in the Minos edition of Alciato's *Emblemata*.

The use of devices for decorative purposes became as popular as decorative emblems which I discuss below (page 327). Devices were displayed on jewelry, medals, cap-badges and on rings for both men and women and, in England, devices were used in earnest by the armies of both sides in the Civil War so as to distinguish the combatants in battle. Thus the wheel came full circle, beginning and ending with the ancient heraldic tradition. Thomas Blount in the later editions of his translation of Estienne from which I have quoted at length uses these civil war devices to illustrate his book.³

¹ Edgar Wind 1937 66

² Alciato Emblem 158, Paradin Device 68, Giovio Device 119

³ Descriptions of some of these devices are given in Young 1999 209