

A Gathering of Emblem Books

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The University of Iowa Library houses a fairly extensive and quite representative collection of early editions of emblem books or *emblemata*. At present there are nearly eighty emblem books in this collection. These books, most of which were written in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries, were extremely popular throughout Europe during their time. Indeed, Mario Praz's more or less comprehensive listing contains some eight hundred separate titles.¹ Many of the more popular works went through ten or more editions, often being translated into several languages or appearing in polyglot editions.

The books themselves are composed of a series of pictures, each accompanied by a motto and a poem or short prose passage. Such an "emblem" was intended to combine the visual and the literary and to have these elements comment upon each other, thus producing a new genre. Because of their varied appeal, these books have value to art historians, historians of ideas, and literary scholars. To an art historian, an emblem may provide the meaning for a parallel image in a painting, since an emblem is often explicated by its accompanying poem. For the historian of ideas, *emblemata* may show that concepts found in one area—religion or politics, for example—can often be found in another, such as the visual arts. And, finally, literary scholars can use these books to help establish the milieu in which a particular work was written, thereby aiding them with such problems as the interpretation of allegory or the source of a given literary image.

As with any genre, *emblemata* may be divided into a number of subtypes. The earliest works were mainly assemblages of "moral" emblems. Later groups of books were devoted to the themes of politics, love, and religion or divine love. Eventually the genre gave rise to anthologies and to works with a mixture of these themes, and even

¹ Mario Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery* (London, 1939-1947).

to comprehensive works arranged alphabetically in order to serve as reference books.

Andrea Alciati's *Emblematum Liber* is perhaps the best known of the "moral" emblems, for it was this work which in 1531 initiated the whole genre of *emblemata*. In all, Iowa has six early editions by Alciati written in Latin and Italian, including the edition with commentaries by Minois (1621).²

Typical of these works, and of "moral" emblems in general, is the didactic image of Tantalus in the *Liber* of Alciati. Tantalus is pictured in Hades, immersed in water up to his neck, while he stretches out in vain for fruit placed just beyond his reach. In the background are sinners perishing in flames. In the original Greek legends, Tantalus was merely being punished for one of a variety of crimes against the gods, but Alciati presents his eternal thirst and hunger as representative of the insatiable state of all covetous men. Thus he labels the emblem "Avaritia" or Avarice.

Diego de Saavedra's *Idea de un Principe*, typical of political emblem books, is well represented in editions at Iowa. In addition to the first of 1640, our library owns the first Latin edition of 1649 and the first translation into English of 1700.³ The aim of this work, as with books of "moral" emblems, is to teach, although in this case the lessons are political and the student is expected to learn to govern. Emblem IV, for example, suggests that a prince, by considering the image of a tree with a basket of earth tied to one of its limbs, might learn to avoid letting any noble or province gain too much independence. The prose passage explains that, even as a gardener can produce a new tree from an old one in this fashion, a prince can lose part of his kingdom by granting too much power to his dependents. Instead of being didactic, however, some political emblem books were mainly laudatory. *Lagrymas de la Paz* by Balcarcel y Formento, representative of this type, contains a variety of emblems on the theme of the greatness of the loss of Ferdinando III of Spain to the cause of peace.⁴ Generally these emblems portray a weeping girl who represents peace, often in company with some sort of consolation figure such as "Divine Love" or "Faith."

Works devoted to amatory themes were also common. Iowa has a first edition of Octavio van Veen's *Amorum Emblemata* (1608)⁵ and

² Andrea Alciati, *Emblemata cum Commentariis Clavdii Minois* (Patavia, 1621).

³ Diego de Saavedra Fajardo, *Idea de un Principe Politico Christiano. Representado en Cien Empresas* (Monaco [i.e. Munich], 1640).

⁴ Domingo Balcarcel y Formento, *Lagrymas de la Paz* (Mexico, 1762).

⁵ Octavio van Veen, *Amorum Emblemata* (Antwerp, 1608).

an undated copy (thought to be ca. 1700) of Ayres' *Emblems of Love* (1683).⁶ Emblems in these works usually reflected a particular tenet of Renaissance amatory theory, such as the belief that a lover depends for his existence on the very pains which plague him. This theory is illustrated by Veen in the emblem of a salamander, which according to legend was supposed to live on fire.⁷ Its accompanying motto reads: "What is death to others is life to me." Similarly, the idea that one learns to love by degrees can be found in an emblem by Ayres in which Cupid slowly forces an ox to yield to a yoke.

From Medieval times it had been customary to use the imagery of ordinary eros to illustrate divine love, so it is not altogether surprising that Veen should have written an *Amoris Divini Emblemata* some seven years after the already-mentioned *Amorum* (Iowa has the 1660 edition of the *Amoris*).⁸ Indeed, among Veen's emblems of divine love, the yoke of love, which later appeared in Ayres' work, may be found. In place of Ayres' ox is *Anima*, or the Christian soul; here the stress is not so much upon the wearing effects of time, however, as on the necessity for Christian submission: "It is not possible that one love well without receiving it [the yoke]."

Veen's work was soon followed by the immensely popular *Pia Desideria* (1624) of Herman Hugo, from which many later emblem books derive their material.⁹ A typical case is Hugo's elaboration on the familiar lines from the Psalms, "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." This same emblem is repeated by Quarles in *Trinitas Emblemata*,¹⁰ by Engelgrave in *Lux Evangelica*,¹¹ and by Elger in *Zinne-beelden der Liefde*.¹² With slight variations, the soul in these emblems rides a hart towards a *fons vitae* or fountain of life in which stands a Cupid (or a child-like angel) bleeding from wounds like those of Christ. Quarles explains that the

⁶ Philip Ayres, *Emblems of Love, in Four Languages* (London, ca. 1700).

⁷ The salamander is found also in Claude Paradin's *Symbola Heroica*, of which Iowa has an edition of 1600; in Camillo Camilli's *Imprese*, which Iowa owns in the first edition of 1586; and in Jacob Cats' *Alle de Wercken*, of which Iowa has an edition dated 1722.

⁸ Octavio van Veen, *Amoris Divini Emblemata* (Antwerp, 1660). The first edition appeared in 1615.

⁹ Iowa's collection includes a Dutch edition of 1629 and a Latin edition of 1632. Praz notes that there were forty-two Latin editions of Hugo's *Pia Desideria* before 1757 as well as translations into the major Western European languages.

¹⁰ Francis Quarles, *Trinitas Emblemata* (London, 1676). The first edition was published in 1639.

¹¹ Henricus Engelgrave, *Lux Evangelica sub Velum Sacrorum Emblematum Recondita in Anni Dominicas* (Cologne, 1655-1659). Iowa has only volume 2.

¹² Willem den Elger, *Zinne-beelden der Liefde* (Amsterdam, 1725).

soul, thirsting for the love of God, is wounded and poisoned by the Hound of Hell. The fountain, then, will quench her thirst, be a balm to her wounds, and draw out any poison. The image of the *fons vitae* was, of course, long established in Christian art and had appeared in a number of forms, such as the Christ, in Dilherr's *Augen- und Hertzens-Lust*, whose blood descends to save a sinner in hell.¹³

Although much of the religious imagery in emblem books is directly connected to the Bible, as in the case of the hart and the *fons vitae*, other emblematic images relate only indirectly and have non-biblical sources. The pelican, for instance, signifies the crucifixion but is not itself biblical. It was traditionally believed that the pelican pecked its breast in order to feed its young with its own blood. From this tradition arose an association with Christ, who allowed himself to be pierced on the cross to feed, in the Eucharist, all mankind. The pelican emblem was quite common and may be seen both in Westmorland's *Otia Sacra* of 1648¹⁴ and in Stengel's *Ova Paschalia*.¹⁵

From the preceding survey, it might seem that most emblem books divide themselves nicely into types devoted to such themes as politics, love, or divine love and that only one theme is usually included in a single book. Quite the contrary, however, is often true. Divine and political emblems are both found in Typotius' *Symbola*,¹⁶ divine and moral emblems may be seen together in Wither's *Collection*,¹⁷ and there is a mingling of military and amorous emblems in Giovio's *Dialogo*.¹⁸ Further, there is a group of books, associated with *emblemata*, which might more properly be designated as catalogues of symbols or as guides to meaning in all of the visual arts. The most famous such work, or iconology, is the *Iconologia* of Cesare Ripa.¹⁹ It is organized by abstract concept so that the reader may, for example, look up "Charity" and find a picture of a woman surrounded by children

¹³ Johann Michael Dilherr, *Augen- und Hertzens-Lust* (Nuernberg, 1661). Iowa's copy of this first edition is bound with a first edition of the same author's *Heilig-Epistolischer Bericht* of 1663.

¹⁴ Mildmay Fane, Earl of Westmorland, *Otia Sacra* (London, 1648).

¹⁵ Georg Stengel, *Ova Paschalia* (Munich, 1635).

¹⁶ Jacobus Typotius, *Symbola Divina & Humana Pontificum, Imperatorum Regum* (Arnheim, 1679). The first edition was published between 1601 and 1603.

¹⁷ George Wither, *Collection of Emblemes Ancient & Moderne; Quickened with Metricall Illustrations, both Moral & Divine, & Disposed into Lotteries that Instruction & Good Counsell may be Furthered by an Honest & Pleasant Recreation* (London, 1635).

¹⁸ Paolo Giovio, *Dialogo dell'Imprese Militari et Amoroze* (Lyon, 1574). The first edition appeared in 1555.

¹⁹ Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Rome, 1603). The first edition of 1593, which Iowa does not have, was without illustrations, but the Iowa collection does include the five-volume edition of this work printed at Perugia between 1764 and 1767.

while nursing an infant. Picinelli's *Mundus Symbolicus* works in just the reverse manner, however, for the reader may look up a variety of concrete objects—trees, birds, the moon—to find their abstract meaning.²⁰ In this respect, the *Mundus* is somewhat like Camerarius' *Symbolorum*, which catalogues a variety of plants and animals and gives their symbolic meaning.²¹

While the preceding survey of *emblemata* at Iowa is scarcely complete, it does indicate to some extent both the nature of the genre and the scope of Iowa's collection. With the increasing academic interest in iconology and in interdisciplinary studies, it should come as no surprise that the collection referred to here has already been of considerable use to students at Iowa. In addition to a variety of seminar papers which have involved work with *emblemata*, there have been at least three theses which have made considerable use of the collection, two in Art and one in English.²² Finally, the Comparative Literature Department is offering a course in iconology in the spring of 1971 which should introduce even more students to the resources of emblem literature.

²⁰ Filippo Picinelli, *Mundus Symbolicus*, in *Emblematum Universitate Formatus, Explicatus, et tam Sacris quam Profanis Eruditionibus ac Sententiis Illustratus* (Cologne, 1687). The first Italian edition appeared in 1635.

²¹ Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum & Emblematum ex Animalibus Quadrupedibus Centuria Altera* (Nuernberg, 1595). In addition to this first edition, the Iowa collection has a four-volume edition of 1702 printed at Mainz.

²² Lillian Natalie Dochterman, *Otto Van Veen's Horatiana Emblemata: An Example of Early Baroque Allegory* (Unpublished M.A. thesis, The University of Iowa, 1955); Shirley Mae Eliason, *The Printmaker as a Poet: Emblematiser or Illustrator* (Unpublished M.F.A. thesis, The University of Iowa, 1954); John Owen Rees, *Hawthorne and the Emblem* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, The University of Iowa, 1965).

By Studie, and by Watchfulnesse,
The femme of Knowledge, we possesse.

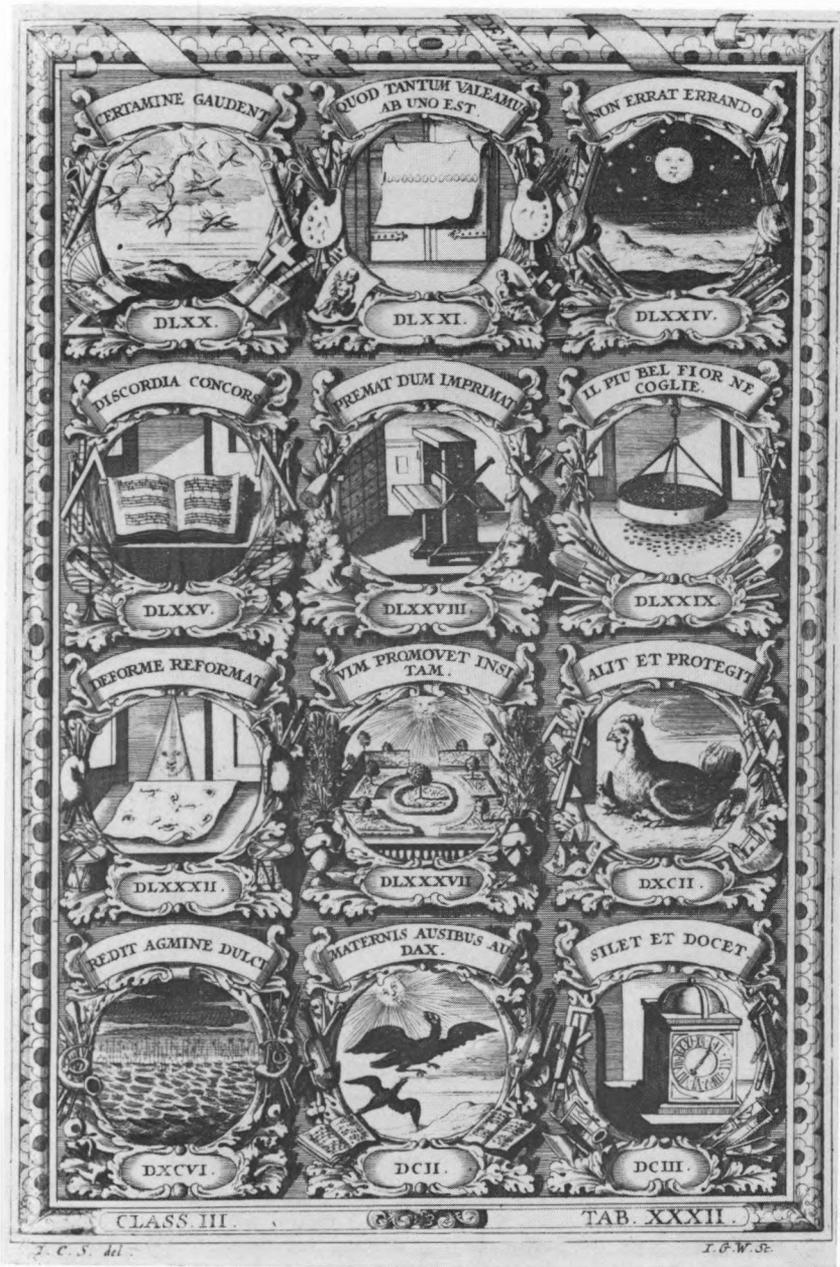


ILLVSTR. XVII.

Book. 2

Thinke you would be wise; for, most men seeme
To make of *Knowledge* very great esteeme.
If such be your desires, this *Emblem* view;
And, marke how well the *Figures*, counsell you.
Wee by the Bird of *Athens*, doe expresse,
That painefull, and that usefull *watchfulnesse*,
Which ought to bee enjoyed, unto them,
Who seeke a place, in *Wisdomes* Academ.
For, as an *Owle* mewes up her selfe by *Day*,
And watcheth in the *Night*, to get her prey;
Ev'n so, good *Students*, neither must be such,
As *daily* gad; or *nighly* sleepe too much.

Upper two-thirds of a page from George Wither's *A Collection of Emblemes . . . Quickened With Metricall Illustrations . . .* (London, 1635).



Twelve emblems headed "Academiae" from Jacob Bosch's *Symbolographia* (Augsburg, 1702). The volume contains 171 of these full-page plates, engraved by Jacob Müller or J. G. Wolfgang after designs by I. C. Schalk.