

STYLISTICS AND EMBLEMATICS: ACCOUNTING FOR THE EVOLUTION OF ENGLISH EMBLEMATICS FROM A RELEVANCE THEORETIC PERSPECTIVE

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The article discusses the evolution of English emblematics and the changing patterns of its relationship with the reader from a Relevance Theory point of view. As multifaceted and multimodal forms of communication, and profoundly plural forms of textuality able to suit the most various ideological needs, emblem books make up a very interesting corpus of texts, while Relevance Theory, with its emphasis on a participatory reader, provides a significant theoretical model for their stylistic analysis and for the examination of the causes and effects of the transformation of their hieroglyphic essence into a conservative didactic one. A stylistic analysis can shed light on the variations and the ideological relevance of emblems in a period rife with political and social tensions; it is therefore particularly suitable for the analysis of the different rhetorical strategies deployed by opposing political or religious factions to direct the reader in the process of recognising the narrator's communicative intention. As a matter of fact, the more we move into the 17th century, the more worried English emblematisers appear about the conflict between the conventional meanings of an emblem and its implicatures, between overt and covert teachings, between dominant and interstitial (or even subversive) reading possibilities. This entailed the evolution from a basically inferential model to a more coded form of communication, whose meaning potential the authors were at pains to limit and control. Stressing the importance of personal response to the composition, but at the same time anxiously imposing a hermeneutic practice to prevent or filter out potentially wrong interpretations, emblem writers were in fact trying to interpellate (in the Althusserian sense) their readers, stimulating their active response to both the creation and the imposition of meaning, paradoxically making them at the same time producers and targets of the message.

The article discusses the evolution of English emblematics and the changing patterns of its relationship with the reader from a relevance theoretic point of view. In particular, the Relevance Theory model of

communication developed by Sperber – Wilson (1995), with its emphasis on a participatory reader, will provide the main theoretical framework for this analysis.¹ The first two sections will provide the theoretical guidelines to supply the necessary introductory notions on emblematics and their features from a relevance theoretic standpoint, while the last part will feature a more in-depth analysis of some emblems as case studies, trying to show how the production of emblems changed from lesser to more constraining texts, from more inferential to more coded forms of communication, from stimulating the reader's response to interpellating his body and soul transforming him into a properly controlled *subjectus*.

Emblem books make up a very interesting corpus of texts, whose multifaceted and multimodal nature has always represented a challenge for critics and scholars alike. Emblems and devices developed from ancient and medieval symbolic forms, but in the Early Modern Period they acquired a new philosophical and cognitive dimension and they were even considered a pure form of intuitive knowledge, and thus the perfect instrument for investigating not only the world but also the very transcendent essence of the divine.² Moreover, an emblematic composition did not possess a single, immediately perceptible meaning;³ on the contrary, its

¹ In the following pages I will also make cursory references to other stylistic models, such as Grice's, to highlight some features of Early Modern emblems. Of course, this is not to claim that the two theoretical models are the same, but only that their inferential models of communication can be fruitfully used together to discuss the way such an idiosyncratic form of textuality as emblematics creates expectations in the reader and guide him to its interpretation.

² As Heffernan (1991: 26-27) clarifies, in the Renaissance "the word 'concept' meant both *idea* and *metaphor*...it was impossible for a thoughtful Renaissance person who used the word strictly not to mean concurrently 'shadow of the eternal Idea'... so tiny a 'point' as an emblem, even if in a shadowy way, could embody vast, eternal truths...by means of an emblem's sensible image a person's soul could rise to intellectual and spiritual heights." On this topic see of course the classic studies by Gombrich (1948), Clements (1960), Praz (1964), Henkel – Schöne (1967).

³ In his seminal study on the Italian theories on *impresa* (or devices), Klein (1957) has shown how the emblematic milieu was influenced not only by

richness was to be discovered progressively in the course a sort of mystic contemplation in which the various parts of the composition (traditionally referred to as *motto-inscriptio*, *picture-pictura*, and *text-subscriptio*) mutually explained one another. So if emblems and devices were a pleasant way to enrich the figurative and didactic aspect of a text, they also entailed a textual practice deeply reliant on the hermeneutic answer of the reader, who in a way created the meaning more than the author.

Emblem theorists stressed the necessary interplay of text, image and motto,⁴ that mutually reinforced one another's richness of implicatures and, thus, multiplied the range of possible interpretations. Emblematics, then, proscribed a passive reading and expected an active interpretation by the reader, who must unravel and build the connections between the visual and the verbal parts. Early emblematics, in other words, was characterized by some

Neoplatonic but also by Aristotelian philosophy, thus demonstrating how emblematics in general, and *imprese* in particular, were typical in that they did not simply reflect or illustrate an idea conceived by the author but were used to express a concept that, in its turn, was to become for the reader "the instrument for [the] poetic exploration of reality.", as Mazzeo put it (1953: 231).

⁴ Even if for some critics there is a basic arbitrariness in the coupling of the motto and the image, the interdependence between the written and the visual parts of devices and emblems can be considered an inherent characteristic of this form. As Colie (1973: 37) put it: "No part of the emblem - figure, epigram, caption, or adage - was supposed to translate any other: rather all the elements were by their special means to point inward to a single idea, supported in part by all of them". The classic position was Giovio's (1561: 6), who in his treatise on devices recommended the "giusta proportione d'anima e di corpo" (just proportion of body and soul, i.e. image and motto). In his preface to the reader to the translation of Giovio's treatise, Daniel (1585: A7r) is more explicit and wordy in recommending that "the figure without the mot, or the mot without the figure, signifie nothing in respect to the intent of the author, and this precept is of great importance, for many ignorant hereof, haue composed *Imprese* altogether vayne and voyde of all inuention. As when the figure of it selfe or the mot of it selfe, suffice to declare the meaning, wherefore either the one or the other is superfluous."

particularly idiosyncratic features: it was partial (the emblemist only gave one possible reading of the text proposed), democratic (the text encouraged alternative interpretations), unassuming (an emblematic composition had ultimately to be a self-effacing form of communication alluding to something else), inherently not exhaustive (no emblem could claim to communicate the ultimate meaning of a certain composition), prodigal (each emblem squandered a multitude of inputs enabling the reader to follow them up), polyphonic (the emblemist did not impose his own point of view as the only correct interpretation).⁵

Yet, these features were not perceived as a quandary: early emblemists took it for granted that the texts they were producing (and the ideas they intended to convey) would trigger off enough contextual effects to be worth the readers' attention and effort. The basic idea was that there was more to enjoying an emblem than just recovering its exact meaning, due to the inherent gap between the semantic representation provided by a text and the potentially infinite concepts it might communicate.⁶ What today would be classified as communicative indeterminacy was in fact quintessential for the appreciation of an emblematic composition, because this form of textuality was heavily reliant on the notion of language as a

⁵ Of course, the hermeneutic moment was the most delicate and problematic aspect in any emblematic composition, and things were not always so straightforward and linear as the above words might seem to imply: as Pinkus (1996: 8) rightly maintains, "a hybrid, or combinatory, form like the emblem might effectively temper writing with images to mediate fears of misreading or dissimulation" but the same time "the copresence of both word and image only increases the silence emitted, so the form could potentially be replenished with meaning by readers who are ill prepared to extract the one, true significance."

⁶ If today this sounds almost a truism, it was not necessarily so in a climate like the Early Modern period, whose epistemological and hermeneutic beliefs were deeply concerned with problems of language and its overall reliability.

productive semiotic system whose meaning production potential was virtually infinite.⁷

However, the further we get into the XVII century, the stronger the pressures and limitations on the reader's hermeneutic abilities, and the more evident the progressive passage from the "hieroglyphical" approach described above to a conservative didactic one (semiotically speaking, the attempt to transform emblems from symbols and indices into icons). With time, emblematists appear more and more worried about the conflict between the conventional meanings of an emblem and its implicatures, between overt and covert teachings, between dominant and interstitial (or even subversive) reading possibilities. Providing evidence for an intended communicative hypothesis about the writer's intentions was not enough anymore, and emblematists strove to impose a decoding procedure to be correctly applied to an "undistorted signal" in order to guarantee the recovery of the correct (i.e., the intended) interpretation.

Pinpointing the reasons of this change goes beyond the scope of the present essay, but it seems no coincidence that this hermeneutic anxiety became blatant when emblemativity began to

⁷ The innumerable "misreadings" induced by an emblematic construction were not perceived as such; on the contrary, they were the proof of the infinite richness of the emblematic creation, because, as Thomas Blount (1646: 9) claimed in his translation of Henri Estienne's famous treatise, the devise "after the manner of mysteries, [it] conceals more than it discovers". This idea was almost a tenet for those writers who still cherished the idea of a hermetic, hieroglyphic linguistic system who could communicate in an intuitive way using universal symbols. Of course, such a symbolic form was not for everybody, but, as a Silenus whose discouraging outward appearance hid a fulfilling interior, was a form which had to rely on allusion and metaphorical communication to keep its meaning from the masses. Elitist as this idea of language could be, it nevertheless granted the exhilarating capacity of providing an intuitive form of communication akin to divine language which was not obsessed by problems of referential reliability or by the desperate attempt to keep the Foucaultian tie between words and things.

express religious truths,⁸ especially in Protestant countries: emblematic compositions were sensible, concrete things that ultimately aimed at representing a spiritual meaning reducing “conceits intellectual to images sensible” as Bacon has it in his definition of emblem (Bacon 1957: 2.XV.3), and therefore they constituted an unlawful, dangerous union of material and spiritual that could lead to such abominations as the hope to represent and experience God sensually.⁹ At the same time, the whole tradition of Western mysticism demonstrates how important concrete signs were for contemplation,¹⁰ and accordingly images began to be more refined, more detailed, more carefully printed and in most cases created on purpose instead of recycled from previous collections.

Such ideological trends are present in most European emblem collections, but, due to its derivative character, English emblematics was more prone to this kind of in- and con-struction of the reader.¹¹ The increasing ideological pressure imposed on emblematics was almost inevitable in a period rife with the political, religious, and

⁸ As early as 1939, in his seminal study, Praz (1964) had considered the religious use of emblems as a fundamental distortion in the emblematic form that ultimately led to its dismissal as a purely decorative and hollow art.

⁹ On this see Lewalski (1979) and Borgogni (2004).

¹⁰ After all, the whole tradition of Western mysticism demonstrates how important concrete signs are for contemplation: as Riehle (1981: 147) has it, “vivid descriptions are meant to express that even the soul’s own powers of understanding are dependent for knowledge of God on what they are shown.”

¹¹ English emblematisers did not elaborate any truly original philosophy of emblems and devices, but they knew continental treatises on this subject and were well informed on the state of the art thanks to their translations: as Bath (1994: 133) avers, “We should be in no doubt that by the end of the sixteenth century the major voices in this continental debate were known in England”. What is more relevant to the present discussion, however, is not so much the relative lack of originality in English emblematics, as the fact that most English emblem books were produced in the XVII century, when more didactic and devotional emblematic texts were gaining momentum, thus showing a marked leaning for the explicit imposition of meanings and values.

social tensions that characterized the Modern world. Moreover, the increasing radicalization of the English political and social scene that would ultimately lead to the tumultuous midcentury events had its literary counterpart in the heated debates on the nature and function of language, on the difficult coexistence of literal and allegoric interpretations of texts (especially in the Bible), on the possibility of contriving universal language schemes to restore and guarantee the link between words and things. Language was increasingly perceived as a “fallen” instrument of communication, necessary but at the same time more and more unreliable, and the proliferation of pamphlets, leaflets, broadsheets, and publications, with their variegated ideological stances and myriad hermeneutic nuances, seemed to usher in a new Babel of unforeseeable consequences.¹²

As a consequence, the hieroglyphic foundations of emblematics were progressively superseded, or to be more precise, were still alluded to but as a sort of enticement to season a kind of emblematic composition that was radically different and that reflected the polarization of language and culture that was becoming the norm at all levels, and in all political and religious denominations.¹³ English emblematics was then a sort of catalyst in the difficult reconciliation of hermeneutic and religious issues with the growing urge for re-creating the reader body and soul that became paramount during the early Jacobean years.

This ultimately meant that pictures became less evocative and more representative, less open to the reader’s speculation and more rigidly conceived to illustrate and reinforce the central meaning of the emblem. The increasing suspicion against the use of images,

¹² As Achinstein (Holstun 1992: 16) has it, “I see the universal language schemes as one response to and outcome of the pamphlet wars of the English Revolution. Put simply, to many, the English Revolution *was* Babel”. Also Pooley (1992: 154) stressed that books played a fundamental part in the civil strife: “Looking back, it seems as though the pamphlet war of the 1640s was of parallel importance to Cromwell winning battles; we can see a revolutionary ideology being created, pushing as well as pushed by events.”

¹³ For a useful outlook on these aspects see Almási (2009).

symbols, and metaphors that characterized the English epistemological scene in the XVII century predictably led to parallel hermeneutic fears. However, the most important consequence of all this was not that the philosophy of the courtier was lost, or that the very essence of emblematics was utterly undermined by an enforced coexistence with religious subjects. The increasing guidance of the reader and the progressive reduction of the readers' hermeneutic responsibility meant that the appeal to the reader's active response during the hermeneutic process was no more a way to stimulate his independent interpretive abilities, but a surreptitious way of forcing some concepts into his mind with his own cooperation. In a renovated version of the traditional, Augustinian idea that conversion entailed the reshaping of man's soul, English emblematics increasingly fostered the idea that, as Thomas Heffernan has it, "For the spiritual meaning of an emblem to be written on a person's heart, he must co-operate with re-forming, re-creating, divine grace" (1991: 15).

The general tendency can, thus, be summarized as the attempt to take advantage of the didactic potential of the emblematic form while, at the same time, dispensing with its more "dangerous" features, so that readers might be agreeably educated. Stressing the importance of the personal response to the composition, but at the same time anxiously imposing a hermeneutic practice to prevent or filter out potentially wrong interpretations, emblem writers were in fact trying to interpellate (in the Althusserian sense) their readers, stimulating their response to both create and self-impose a certain meaning, paradoxically making them at the same time producers and targets of the message.

II

If the different rhetorical strategies deployed by writers to direct the reader in the process of recognising their communicative intention are usefully exposed by a stylistic analysis, Relevance Theory seems especially suitable in the case of emblematics: the centrality of the interpretative moment rather than the creative one is in tune with the

theoretical model of inferential pragmatics¹⁴ that relies on the reader's ability to infer a multitude of meanings drawing implicatures.¹⁵ Moreover, the very idea of contextual implication (a conclusion that can be inferred only from the joint consideration of input and context) shares one of the central tenets of emblematic reading, namely the necessity of deriving interpretations from the interaction of all the elements of the composition.¹⁶

Early emblems were conceived as texts creating expectations in the readers, and the pleasure of their interpretation lay in the inferential process of reconstruction of possible meanings triggered off by the interrelationship between motto, image and text. In the emblematists' mind, any emblematic composition would bring about positive cognitive effects not only because it produced a positive modification of the reader's interpretation of the world (for example, strengthening or revising one's contextual implications or assumptions), but also because the act itself of its processing was

¹⁴ As Wilson – Sperber (1994: 90) acknowledge, “inferential communication involves the formation and evaluation of hypotheses about the communicator's intentions. [...] the work of Grice (1975, 1978) is a major contribution to the study of hypothesis confirmation or evaluation within an inferential theory of communication.”

¹⁵ As Wilson – Sperber (1994: 105) usefully remind, “Implicatures have two sources. Some implicatures are contextual assumptions which the hearer was expected to use in processing the explicit propositional content of the utterance: like all contextual assumptions, such implicatures are derived from memory or from observation of the environment. Other implicatures are contextual implications which the hearer was expected to recover in processing the explicit propositional content of the utterance: like all contextual implications, such implicatures are derived by deductive inference from the explicit propositional content of the utterance and the context. The more salient the implicature, the stronger it is.”

¹⁶ The idea that the meaning of an emblematic composition could be provided only by the interplay of its visual and textual elements is in tune with Wilson – Sperber's idea (Horn – Ward 2004: 608) that the “most important type of cognitive effect is a CONTEXTUAL IMPLICATION, a conclusion deducible from input and context together, but from neither input nor context alone”. On the concept of cognitive effect see Sperber – Wilson 1995, §2.7.

relevant, in that it induced a fulfilling form of intuitive knowledge akin to God's own thoughts. Despite its heavy reliance on folklore, proverbs, and traditional wisdom, emblematics did not aim at duplicating old information but at achieving new synthetic implications through the interaction between new and old information (to paraphrase Sperber – Wilson's idea of contextual implications 1995: 109).

What made early emblematics so peculiar, in other words, was not only the positive cognitive effects it produced, but also the fact that they implied a special processing effort: while, according to Wilson – Sperber, “the greater the processing effort expended, the lower the relevance of the input to the individual” (Horn – Ward 2004: 609), XVI-century emblems were deliberately built to require a long and time-consuming perusal, stimulating the hermeneutic response in their readers. The relevance (and pleasure) of an emblem lay not only in what readers were taught but also in the process of intuiting and hypothesizing new possible meanings, never being satisfied with the more accessible ones in the persuasion of verging on the essence of divine logic.

As the following examples will hopefully demonstrate, early emblematics relied on the prodigal expense of processing effort, while later emblematics was more “orthodox”, because the pursuit of optimal relevance always came at the expense of processing effort. Early emblems, thus, were always considered rich in positive cognitive effects and aimed at maximising relevance in a very different way from the following years, when emblematisers were keener on imposing a more efficient use of the readers' processing resources.

This change is also confirmed by the different use of ostensive stimuli, that are at the basis of the concept of optimal relevance: according to Sperber – Wilson (1995: 49-54), the use of ostension to attract and focus the audience's attention creates the expectation of relevance, so that an audience pays only attention to a stimulus that is explicitly pointed at as relevant and that conveys the presumption of its own optimal relevance. Optimal relevance is, thus, achieved when an ostensive stimulus is relevant enough to be worth the

Stylistics and Emblematics

audience's processing effort and it is the most relevant one compatible with the writer's abilities and preferences.¹⁷

Seen from this point of view, the difference between early and later emblematics rests mainly on a different idea of what is the most relevant ostensive stimulus: any emblematicist strove to convince his readers that his emblems deserved the processing effort, but whereas hieroglyphic emblems were deliberately conceived to stimulate readers to draw further meanings and stronger conclusions than would have been warranted by the writer himself,¹⁸ in later and more didactic emblems writers aimed at making their ostensive stimuli as easy as possible for the audience to understand, and at providing explicit evidence for the cognitive effects that readers were supposed to gain.

In other words, in early emblematics readers could take it for granted that the meanings of an emblem were potentially infinite, and that the writer's acts of ostensive communication could only presume their optimal relevance: the writers' words were basically the initial steps to more relevant messages "created" by the active hermeneutic effort of the readers, and emblems were composed to have many implicatures, contextual assumptions and implications, in short a whole range of further premises and conclusions that readers were trusted to imagine or draw for themselves.¹⁹ On the contrary,²⁰

¹⁷ This is the definition of optimal relevance provided by Wilson – Sperber in Horn – Ward (2004: 612), which is the elaboration of the original one proposed in Sperber – Wilson (1995: 158).

¹⁸ According to Relevance Theory, the reader's goal is usually to make hypotheses about the writer's meaning which satisfies the presumption of relevance conveyed by a message. In the case of emblematics, however, the presumption of relevance is tied to a concept of meaning that is inherently plural: the writer has of course something relevant to communicate, but he is also well aware of the fact that this meaning cannot be considered the one and only relevant message that his emblem can communicate; in the end, it is the reader who is entitled to draw conclusions and build meanings that might be not even imagined by the original author.

¹⁹ After all, it is worth remembering that most emblematicists "recycled" images from other collections. This was of course an economic necessity, but confirms that fact that an image could be used in many ways and its

later and more didactic emblems aimed at conveying only one fundamental message, whose ostensive stimulus was considered the most relevant one that the writer wanted and was able to produce. Readers were induced to follow the path of least effort and limit their hermeneutic effort to recover the one intended meaning, so the typical comprehension process of constructing hypotheses about explicatures and implicatures was clearly discouraged: later emblems were explicitly conceived to prevent readers from constructing hypotheses and to narrow down possible lines of interpretation, so as to encourage them to accept the ready-made conclusions provided by the emblematic composition.²¹ The latter model, then, was functional to a more pervasive ideological practice of imposing meanings and behaviours, as the following analysis will try to highlight.

A last, but fundamental, element to take into account for the present discussion is the different use of strong and weak implicatures. In early emblematics, readers would consider the linguistically encoded message as a clue to a whole range of meanings and, using encyclopaedic contextual assumptions triggered off by that message, they could start deriving a potentially infinite

various elements might acquire a relevance that was not present in the original image.

²⁰ Of course it would be pointless to try and draw a rigid distinction between the two: as Sperber – Wilson rightly stressed (1995: 199), the “fiction that there is a clear-cut distinction between wholly determinate, specifically intended inferences and indeterminate, wholly unintended inferences cannot be maintained.”

²¹ Of course, just as “utterances do not always communicate the concepts they encode” (Wilson – Sperber 2012: 23), so the explicit content of a message goes well beyond its purely linguistic encoding; very often we come across indicators carrying “other types of information, which contribute to speaker’s meaning in other ways than by encoding regular concepts” (Wilson – Sperber 2012: 24), which means that it is always possible to construct a number of hermeneutic hypotheses in any emblem. The cultural context of its reception, however, is different: in the case of early emblematics readers’ expectations were more sophisticated, and, therefore, what was expected was merely attempted or purported optimal relevance, whereas in later emblematics readers’ were encouraged towards a less sophisticated expectation of actual optimal relevance.

series of cognitive effects to satisfy their expectations of relevance. As Wilson – Sperber (Horn – Ward 2004: 618) maintain, “The effect of such a flexible interpretation process may be a loosening rather than a narrowing of the encoded meaning (resulting in a broader rather than a narrower denotation)” with the consequence that the interpretation of a message “might then involve both a loosening and a narrowing of the encoded meaning” as alternative ways to achieving optimal relevance.

This loose use of language and the relative degree of indeterminacy that it produces is of course linked to the relative strength of implicatures.²² As already discussed above, the very essence of early emblemativity was the prodigal use of inputs to stimulate the reader’s own hermeneutic participation in the meaning production, and the less clear cut the semantic differences involved, the greater the number of possible meanings, the greater the readers’ responsibility, the weaker the implicatures.

If any emblem aimed at optimal relevance, the ways to achieve it progressively changed, until they became mutually exclusive: from a relevance theoretic point of view, the “evolution” of emblemativity was in fact the “involution” from a basically inferential praxis to a

²² On this concept see Sperber – Wilson (1995: 199-201), even though Wilson – Sperber (Horn – Ward 2004: 620) provides a more schematic definition. Wilson – Sperber (2012: 117) propose: “The speaker may have in mind a specific implication on which the relevance of her utterance depends, and a strong intention that the hearer should derive it; in that case it is strongly implicated. At the other extreme, she may have in mind a vague range of possible implications with roughly similar import, any subset of which would contribute to the relevance of her utterance, and a weak intention, for any of the implications in that range, that the hearer should derive it; these are weak implicatures.”

For the present discussion, Wilson – Sperber (1994: 99) is perhaps the clearest: “There is a necessary connection between strength (or saliency) of implicatures and determinacy of interpretation. An interpretation is determinate to the extent that its implicatures are strong, and implicatures are strong to the extent that there are no alternative assumptions which a speaker aiming at optimal relevance might have expected the hearer to access and use.”

more coded form of communication,²³ whose meaning potential the authors were at pains to limit and control. As Wilson – Sperber’s definition demonstrates, there is a necessary connection between the strength (or saliency) of implicatures and the determinacy of interpretation: an interpretation is determinate to the extent that its implicatures are strong, and implicatures are strong to the extent that there are no alternative assumptions which a writer might have expected the reader to access and use. So, whereas early emblems mainly achieved relevance by weakly suggesting a wide array of possible implications and demanded additional processing effort because they were expected to achieve additional contextual effects, later emblems were carefully constructed so as to reduce the processing effort and convey few strong implicatures.

III

In order to show the transformation of English emblematics, some selected examples of emblems belonging to different periods will be taken into consideration: Thomas Palmer’s *Two Hundred Poosees* (1566) provides a good example of “hieroglyphic” emblematics relying on weak implicatures; H.G.’s *Mirrovr of Maiestie* (1618) best witnesses the transition between the two forms of emblematics mentioned above; finally, two emblems from Thomas Jenner’s *The Soules Solace* (1626) and Francis Quarles’ *Emblemes* (1639) will be analysed to show how, despite their opposing religious and political affiliations, the two writers were at pains to produce more didactic emblems relying on strong implicatures in order to impose a more rigid interpretation of their texts.

²³ It goes without saying that any utterance is a linguistically coded piece of evidence, and that any verbal comprehension involves an element of decoding. I am using *inferential* and *coded* in the light of the definition provided by Wilson – Sperber (Horn – Ward 2004: 607): “According to the code model, a communicator encodes her intended message into a signal, which is decoded by the audience using an identical copy of the code. According to the inferential model, a communicator provides evidence of her intention to convey a certain meaning, which is inferred by the audience on the basis of the evidence provided.”

Stylistics and Emblematics

Thomas Palmer's *Two Hundred Poosees* (1566)²⁴ was the first English emblem book and its emblems provide a number of multifarious and puzzling inputs, granting the reader a remarkable hermeneutic freedom. In line with those theorists who recommended that an emblematic composition should not be immediately comprehensible, emblem 43 features an evident dyscrasia between the motto which provides the title of the whole composition –“He that giveth yll counsell is as muche as he that dothe the yll deede”– and the *pictura*:



from Andrea Alciato, *Andreae Alciati emblematum libellus* (1534)

The image, copied from emblem LV of the Paris edition of Alciato's *Emblems* (1534: 59),²⁵ shows a trumpeter in the foreground surrounded by three people whose identity and function is ambiguous: are they accompanying musicians, singers, thugs or something else? Why is the trumpeter blowing his instrument? The scene, too, is apparently set just outside a city wall, but the function

²⁴ For further information on Palmer's volume see Manning (1986), Manning (1988), and Bath (1994). The only available edition of this collection of emblems is the transcription provided by Manning (1988).

²⁵ English emblematics has a clear derivative nature as to images, themes and organization. For a general survey, apart from the classical study by Freeman (1948), see Daly (1988), and Bath (1994).

Daniele Borgogni

of such a peculiar element as the narrow door on the right is not clear at all: is it the prison door or a “normal” city gate? The same is true for the highly stylized horsemen in the background, who seem to be posing for some painter rather than fighting. On the whole, the image does not present a consistent composition, but a series of icastic figures and gestures that are not even chronologically coherent.

The *subscriptio* offers a partial explanation, but on the whole it is very far from providing a satisfactory piece of information.

The battaile foughte, the conquerors
a trumpeter have spied:
And hales him to the prison straighte,
where he muste nedes abyde.
He pleates his cawse, and thus he saies
I hurte no mannor wighte,
Nor vsed any weapon els,
save this my trumpet lighte.
But they replied, so muche the more
thow haste donne very yll,
Who with thy noyce didste others stirre
to fighte, to hurt, to kyll.
The Orators with bloody tonges
do shewe a greater mighte,
Then warriers with their bilbowblades,
that slaye and kill in fighte.

The first 12 lines are the background to the moment represented in the picture, but they do not make it clear if the trumpeter is shown in the act that caused his arrest, if he is still using his instrument to alert his companions, or if he is being taken to prison: if the latter possibility would seem the most probable, then why is the trumpeter still free to blow?

The final remark, too, seems a totally arbitrary conclusion that comes as a surprise, since it is only marginally linked to the situation presented above: the initial motto had equalled “ill counsels” and “ill deeds”, while in the end the speaking voice just insists that orators are mightier than soldiers, without considering that orators can also give good counsels or that soldiers do not necessarily commit bad actions: it is the reader who is asked to draw the inference that here

orators are arguably to be interpreted as inherently dishonest (but, then, why the term *orator* instead of *rhetorician*?). This ambiguity is extremely important: the unexpected connections between the title and the image, the image and the text, or within the text itself (such as the association of the trumpeter and false orators) are fundamental in entitling and encouraging the reader to establish other possible links by himself, and demonstrate that the whole composition does not aim at imposing a single, correct interpretation, but to provide a series of inputs that is up to the reader to pursue or drop.

Finally, the word *bilbowblades* deserves a mention: the term is not only foregrounded by its final position in the line, but also by the fact that, being a neologism, it draws the reader's attention to itself. As a consequence, the closing lines of the text, which normally summarize the whole poem giving it a witty solution, provide here yet another stumbling block, proposing a very costly word²⁶ whose meaning is not immediately clear, thus opening up new difficulties and possibilities. Moreover, the term obviously refers to the swords of Bilbao, whose blades were notoriously excellent, but its interpretation involves more than mere intuition: it features a multiple foregrounding, from a phonetic (it must be read aloud to understand its association to the Spanish city) as well as from a graphological point of view (the presence of a "bow" in the middle of the word, next to "blades" and within a context of warriors and fights, giving an extremely powerful impression of the omnipresence of war and its instruments), producing a sort of telescopic effect and making the word even more allusive and more demanding for the reader.

²⁶ This "cost" refers of course to the hermeneutic effort that is required from the reader: Wilson – Sperber (1994: 99) stress the importance of processing effort in utterance interpretation: "By demanding extra processing effort - for example, by answering a question indirectly - the speaker can encourage the hearer to look for additional contextual effects in the form of additional weak or strong implicatures." It is a hindrance to the achieving of optimal relevance, since it does not favour communication and interpretation but, on the contrary, imposes a pressure on the reader who then expects an extra meaning and relevance that justify the supplementary effort.

The overall impression is, then, that the meaning of the emblem is repeatedly delayed and hindered: the reader is given great interpretive responsibility, is obliged to stop several times in the reading process, to imagine the details, and to reread the text, progressively discovering possible meanings and links, dismissing some elements as irrelevant and re-considering others. The apparent lack of coherence between the image and the title, all the questions that come naturally to mind while reading, the possible implications they might have, even if they are not discussed in the emblem (for example, is the narrow door just a synecdoche of the prison, or does it have any evangelical overtones? Is the image a totally unrealistic superimposition of various elements, or does it bear any “necessary” relationship with the text?), all this means that the strong implicature of the intended message that the writer wants to communicate is not imposed as the only, correct meaning. On the contrary, the emblem, presents a series of weak implicatures, which are so because they open up alternative, equally accessible interpretations. The composition, in fact, encourages the reader to walk along different hermeneutic paths, to linger and waver through multifarious allusions, building many possible relevant meanings instead of mulishly trying to reconstruct the univocal interpretation conceived by the emblematiser.

To sum up, such a text imposes a kind of fruitfulness that seems to defy the more straightforward model of communication envisioned by pragmatists: seen from a Gricean perspective,²⁷ for instance, the text would feature a blatant flouting of several of his maxims and sub-maxims of conversation: Quantity (the writer is certainly not as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange, since both the image and the text provide a lot of information that is not explained and left open to the reader’s speculation);²⁸ Relation

²⁷ I am obviously referring to the inferential theory of communication which Grice (1989) was also largely responsible for developing.

²⁸ Of course, the problem is not that the writer is unable to give the required information, but that he is unwilling to do it, which is in fact a significant difference between Grice’s model and Sperber – Wilson’s: whereas Grice would consider this a violation of the Co-operative principle, Relevance Theory considers the unwillingness to communicate a possible ostensive

(not all the elements presented in the emblem interact with the reader's existing assumptions about the world, hence the impression of an expense of multifarious inputs); Manner (if the text is arguably brief and orderly, it also fosters ambiguity, and does not avoid obscure expressions, as we have just seen), and even from a relevance theoretic perspective these floutings would imply a significant loss in relevance if the deliberate increase in processing effort were not offset by an increase in implicatures.

On the contrary, for an early emblemist like Palmer the fundamental idea was that there might be potentially infinite revelations in a composition and therefore the expectation was that the cognitive effects were well worth any processing effort, because the pleasure lay exactly in the hermeneutic building of possible readings pursuing the potential contextual assumptions to achieve a certain range of contextual implications.²⁹ This meant that, like many other early emblemists, he was pursuing optimal relevance, but at the same time deeply reliant on the active response of the reader to go after and appreciate the many weak implicatures of his work and, consequently, unleash the whole array of contextual effects produced by little constraining texts.

H.G.'s *Mirrovr of Maiestie* (1618)³⁰ provides a cogent example of the transition between earlier and later emblemativity. The first, macroscopic difference with Palmer's collection is its more explicit interest in applied emblemativity with celebratory purposes, a feature that was virtually absent in Palmer's emblem. Of course, the status of writers and artists was notoriously precarious in that period,

stimulus and not necessarily an essential inability in the communicator. On this see the comments of Wilson – Sperber in Horn – Ward (2003: 612-613).

²⁹ I am using here the two sub-tasks of the comprehension process according to Wilson – Sperber's (2012:13) definition of contextual assumptions as implicated premises and contextual implications as implicated conclusions.

³⁰ H.G. has been traditionally identified with Sir Henry Godyere (o Goodere) attendant to King James as Gentleman of the Privy Chamber. For further information, see Freeman (1948) and Daly–Duer–Raspa (1998).

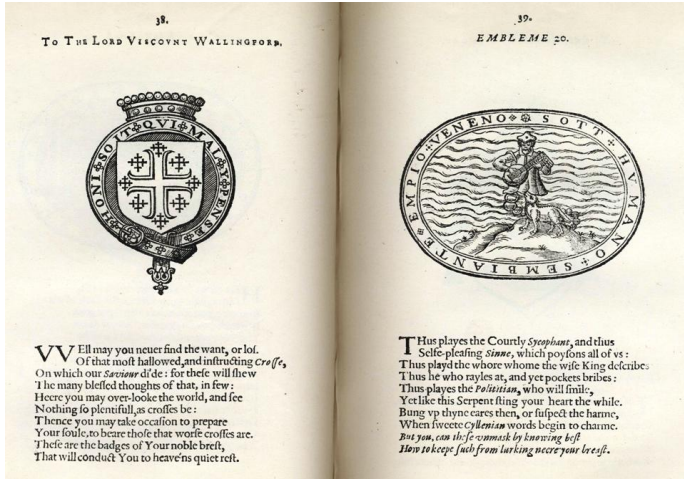
and it was almost necessary to dedicate poems or emblem books to a powerful nobleman (both Palmer's *Two Hundred Poesees* and Whitney's *Choice of Emblemes*, for example, were dedicated to the Earl of Leicester). With time, however, patronage was increasingly seen not only as a generic necessity but increasingly as a central issue of cultural production³¹ and, even if it would be wrong to push the argument too far, this tendency certainly encouraged a more careful enforcement of "correct" hermeneutic practices, and a consequent increasing number of strong constraints.

H.G.'s emblems are quite interesting from this point of view, testifying to the progressive transition from weak to stronger implicatures in XVII-century emblems. Each composition in his collection is dedicated to an important figure of the British aristocracy, with an introductory epigram commenting on the family device followed by an emblem proper. This feature is extremely revealing, since the epigram clearly sets the tone of the entire composition and has a clear bearing on the interpretation of the following emblem.

A good example in case is emblem 20, dedicated to the powerful Viscount of Wallingford:

³¹ From this point of view, H.G.'s emblems are a more evident instance of what Bath (1994: 57) described: "English writers' predilection for such emblematic manuscripts offered to influential patrons is something of a special phenomenon", even if it is difficult to identify the reason of this shift. Whitney (1586: **3v) aimed at publicizing the English military expedition in the Netherlands, but in his preface *To the Reader* he explains that the volume is similar to the original one prepared for Leicester but that he "also haue written somme of the Emblemes, to certaine of my frendes, to whome either in dutie or frendhip, I am diuers waies bounde ... I hope it shall not bee misliked, for that the offices of dewtie and frendship are alwaies to bee fauored". On this see also Manning's *Introduction* to Whitney (1989).

Stylistics and Emblematics



from H.G., *The Mirrovr of Maiestie* (1618)

The epigram is a reminder of the importance of the cross in the family device, that should invite “Your soule, to beare those that worse crosses are” (H.G. 1618: 38). In its turn, the *subscriptio* to the emblem enlarges upon the real nature of those crosses (H.G. 1618: 39):

Thus plays the Courtly *Sycophant*, and thus
Selfe-pleasing *Sinne*, which poysons all of vs:
Thus playd the whore whome the wise King describē:
Thus he who rayles at, and yet pockets bribes:
Thus plays the *Polititian*, who will smile,
Yet like this Serpent sting your heart the while.
Bung vp thyne eares then, or suspect the harme,
When sweete *Cyllenian* words begin to charme.
*But you, can these vnmask by knowing best
How to keepe such from lurking neere your breast.*

The emblem, then, is conceived as a warning against falsity, but it communicates in a very indirect and allusive way. The *picture* shows a dog watching a lute player wading a river; the final part of the musician’s body (partially hidden by the water), however, seems the

tail of a serpent or a scorpion. Thematically, the emblem relies on a frequently exploited *topos* in emblematic literature, Mercury deceiving Argus,³² while the Latin motto encircling the image explicitly links the composition to the traditional association of deceit and false appearance. Doubleness (even from a linguistic point of view, due to the co-presence of Latin and English) will then be a sort of trademark for the whole composition, which H.G. immediately applies to the false courtier (costly called “Sycophant”), and then extends the teaching to a generic first person plural (“all of vs”), even though the moral teaching of the emblem is primarily addressed to the Viscount’s “you”.

The presence of the dog triggers off a series of further overtones: it was an animal variously associated with the idea of fidelity, with death, with vigilance against invisible dangers, but also with Mercury. This reference is reinforced in an even more indirect way by the adjective “*Cyllenian*”. Dictionaries just inform it is an extremely sophisticated synonym of falsity, but there is more to this word than a mere scholarly allusion: it comes directly from Vergil’s *Aeneid*, where it is used only three times (all in Book IV, and all comprised in three curiously near lines –252, 258, 276) when Mercury is sent to remind Aeneas of his glorious destiny. Since, as Wilson – Sperber (1994: 104) maintain, “one factor known to affect processing effort is the frequency with which words are used”, the *subscriptio*, with its strategic use of very unfamiliar terms, such as *Sycophant* and *Cyllenian*, requires a noteworthy processing effort. As a consequence, since it is reasonable to believe that H.G. was aiming at optimal relevance, the writer made this choice because he expected the additional processing effort to be offset by additional contextual effects.

So, the text is “officially” commenting on the image of the *pictura*, but at the same time it is it triggers off a great number of weak implicatures by stimulating a number of interstitial reading

³² See, for instance, *Adulator* in Aneau (1552: 36) or *Dolus inevitabilis* in Sambucus (1564: 58). Iconographically, the long established representation of a half-man-half-animal figure might have been inspired by a recent English model, Peacham’s representation of *Dolus* (1612:47).

possibilities: such key words as *Sycophant*, *Sinne*, *Polititian* and *Cyllenian* are all italicized in a sort of graphological foregrounding,³³ almost suggesting their possibly inherent relationship; the term *Cyllenian* warns that courtiers' words not only are insincere, but (just like Mercury's) have the power to charm the will; at the same time, thanks to its Vergilian echo, the same term subtly (and flatteringly) hints that the Viscount is like a new Aeneas, with a glorious destiny in store for him; through the allusion to the mythical episode of Mercury and Argus, moreover, the reader (but especially the Viscount) is strongly reminded that falsity in the world (and at court, in particular) is so ubiquitous that not even one hundred eyes would be enough to guard against it.

The emblem, thus, does not only aim at gratifying the reader who knows the meaning of those unusual words and can appreciate their scholarly quality; it also weakly implicates that if he is able to detect the quotation, and connect it to the Latin motto, his intellectual abilities will also allow him to tell a faithful person from a false one, or to fare well in the treacherous world of court relationships. Of course, all these meanings are not explicitly present in the emblem, but simply proposed as possible interpretive paths left to the reader's intuition and sensibility (thus they are weak implicatures).

However, they play an important role, since they considerably reinforce the emblem's contextual effects: they provide some new information, which is particularly relevant in that it contradicts, and leads to the elimination of, some existing assumptions on the nature of the Viscount's political relationships at court:³⁴ the emblem is not just a general warning against falsity, but it shockingly reminds the reader and the dedicatee that falsity is stronger, and hence more

³³ Of course, the argument can not be pushed too far: the use of italics seems, indeed, a form of foregrounding, but in that period graphic conventions and even word spelling were not yet fixed and consistently standardized.

³⁴ As Wilson – Sperber (1994: 93) point out, “If new information can achieve relevance by strengthening an existing assumption, it should also achieve relevance by contradicting, and eliminating, an existing assumption.”

dangerous, in the more intimate and apparently trustworthy acquaintance; it ends up being a sadly sceptical piece of advice, recommending a profoundly distrustful attitude to words and people (especially those “neere your breast”) as a matter of course.

Of course, this Machiavellian conclusion does not come as a complete surprise, being a predictable allusion to the cut-throat world of politics. Yet, its importance lies in the fact that it confirms and reinforces an attitude which James I was at pains to show as superseded, by repeatedly claiming that he was a new Henry Tudor, the founder of a new dynasty pursuing peace and reconciliation. By reminding the reader of the real nature of political relationships, and stressing that nothing has really changed, H.G.’s emblem exposes the limits of the king’s idealistic claim and, since (as Sperber and Wilson maintain) the more assumptions an utterance eliminates (and the stronger those assumptions were), the more relevant it will be, the contextual effects of this emblem are great indeed.

The range of weak implicatures and the various interpretive possibilities triggered off by H.G.’s the emblem allow for a clear affiliation of this composition with the early emblematic tradition. Yet, it also features some typical characteristics of later emblematics, making it an ideal *trait d’union* between the two traditions.

A first element to take into account is the presence of a double audience, in that the emblem is addressed to the Viscount but at the same time it is presented to a wider audience of learned readers. The composition is clearly aimed at flattering and celebrating the powerful dedicatee, but at the same time it features a marked ideological bias towards the reader, who is pleased, even flattered in his turn. The scholarly allusions, in particular, are clearly inserted not just to communicate something, but to tickle the learned reader’s vanity. This game with the reader, however, is not an end in itself, but a refined way to hide as much as possible the surreptitious moulding and transformation of the reader himself.

If the *subscriptio* weakly implicates the mythological subtext associating the Viscount to Aeneas, for the same reason it also emphasises the separation between the “you” of the Viscount and “all of vs”: to “our world” belongs the corrupted humanity of flatterers, whores, pickpockets, false courtiers mentioned in the

Stylistics and Emblematics

subscriptio; to “your world” belongs the dog, who is able to discern the real nature of the musician in the water from his vantage ground above the water.

The symbolic separation between “you” and “us” is reinforced at a linguistic level by the anaphoric repetition of “Thus”, which further foregrounds the rhetorical relevance of “But” opening the final distich: after a long list of corrupted human behaviours that “poysen all of vs”, the last two lines isolate the Viscount, marking his unique destiny of glory, provided he is able to prevent or at least limit the consequences of the betrayal of his closest advisors.

As a consequence, the reader’s pleasure of detecting the various allusions and following them through ends with the explicit perception of his own corruption and his irrecoverable separation from the dedicatee and his glorious lot. In this way, the subject of interpretation becomes the subject-*subjectus* of the emblem, and a pleasant, intellectually challenging recreation, becomes the ideological picklock that paves the way for his “re-creation”. So, while the reader toys with the exhilarating experience of identifying and pursuing references and allusions, the emblem brings about a surreptitious practice of transformation to mould the reader’s life and opinions. Ironically, this manipulative capacity had already been denounced by the Latin motto, but only in the end can it be understood in its metatextual dimension as a warning not just against a general falsity, but against the emblem’s own deceiving nature.

Thomas Jenner’s *The Soules Solace* (1626) and Francis Quarles’ *Emblemes* (1639) can be considered two paradigmatic examples of the general tendency to produce increasingly didactic emblems in the XVII century. Jenner’s collection, an explicitly devotional manual by a radical puritan,³⁵ contains emblems with no motto and most of them even include captions to guide the reading process. Both these features are significant, in that they testify to the writer’s intention to provide a simplified version of an emblem: the expunction of the motto simply means that any interplay between it

³⁵ For more information on Jenner and his emblem books see Gottlieb (1983).

Daniele Borgogni

and the other two parts of an emblem is simply eliminated, while the captions clearly reveal a marked didactic intention, to ensure the proper identification of objects, their symbolic meaning and the correct reading of the picture (the first emblem of the collection, “*Ivstification by Faith*”, for example, presents an image with explicitly identified characters representing a sinner, the Devil, Christ’s righteousness, Faith).

In other cases, such as emblem 27, the strategy is different: the image simply presents a lute player tuning his instrument, while the programmatic title, “The New Creation”, duly anticipates the verbose and moralistic *subscriptio*, which reminds the reader of the necessity of a rebirth in order to be beloved of God. The image, then, has a purely decorative function, in that it is strictly tied to the text and just illustrates a single passage of the *subscriptio*, “But when *Gods minister* shall these vp screw, / And so doth tune...” (Jenner 1626: F6r). In other words, the image does not provide a wide array of possible weak implicatures, it is a sort of monologic illustration that is univocally tied to the text it is appended to.



Away with't. Would you know the reason why?
It's out of tune, 'twill make noe melodie.

But

from Thomas Jenner, *The Soules Solace* (1626)

At the thematic level, too, the emblem transforms the musical metaphor into something different: in the wake of Alciato’s emblem II, *Foedera*, (Alciato 1531: A2v-A3r), many past emblematisers had recurred to the lute as symbol of social harmony or faithful

Stylistics and Emblematics

allegiance: being “out of tune” with authorities, friends, or allies, could lead to the worst social consequences. Jenner (1626: F6r), on the contrary, in his comparison between the human body and the musical instrument, transforms the symbol into an Althusserian practice of interpellation:

Yet yeilds he not to *God* a pleasant sound,
Because he is not a *new creature* found,
But when *Gods minister* shall these vp screw,
And so doth tune and make this creature new,
He streight resounds *Spirituall* melody,
And in *Gods* eares giues heavenly harmony.

Any resistance to the complete change brought about by a new spiritual birth means being out of tune with God: any dissonance is now stigmatized as the symptom of inauthenticity, of corruption, of moral conviction with spiritual consequences. The identification of the faithful reader with the lute presents his recreation as an inescapable necessity: his body and soul must be fragmented, cancelled, renewed (Jenner 1626: F6v):

Thou nothing art, whilst thou art but meere nature.
Stocks, Stones, & Beasts, each one of them's a *creature*
And *thou no more*; But wilt thou better be?
Let *Gods word* new transforme, and fashion thee:
As *Instruments*, vnlesse *in tune*, are slighted;
So *men*, except *new made*, ne're *God* delighted.

The invitation to transformation is, in fact, just a confirmation or strengthening of Puritan moral commonplaces, while the rhetorical question, as it often happens, is functional to saying what is optimally relevant to the writer. The necessity of self-betterment is relevant precisely because it strengthens existing assumptions,³⁶

³⁶ And, as Wilson – Sperber (1994: 93) stress, “New information is relevant in any context in which it strengthens an existing assumption; and the more assumptions it strengthens, and the more it strengthens them, the more relevant it will be.”

without straying from the central message of the composition. The emblem does not open up different reading possibilities for the reader, nor is he stimulated to actively take part in the hermeneutic process. There are no alternative assumptions the writer expects the reader to access and use, there is no particular processing effort required of the reader: the monologic structure of the emblem and the fact that all its elements focus on a single, central message create the expectation of relevance, so that the reader is invited to pay attention to a single stimulus that is explicitly pointed at as relevant and that conveys the presumption of its own optimal relevance. The readers' processing resources are thus maximised, optimal relevance is achieved, and the necessity of a complete reformation of the reader's whole life and body is the only, strongly implicated message around which the emblem is built.

A final example comes from Francis Quarles' *Emblemes* (1635), an enormously successful collection which imposed in England the Continental form of devotional emblematics, conceived as a way to capture hearts and bodies, stimulate the imagination and move the reader.³⁷ Quarles' emblems present a reading dynamics that is basically the same as Jenner's: the image³⁸ accompanying the *Invocation* to Book I, for instance, shows a reclined woman (representing Anima) lying down near her theorbo; coins and jewels come out of the sack she is leaning on, while the underlying winged figure with a bow is sleeping. Both figures lie on a stylized globe, and the Latin motto replicates in verbal form what the image depicts. The Latin captions within the image provide a further guide to the reader, reinforcing the moralistic interpretation of the composition. The impression is, thus, of a single message from a monologic voice,

³⁷ On this see the classic study by Hölting (1978) and his entry for the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2008): "It is Quarles's historical achievement to have established in protestant England the dominant type of the Catholic baroque emblems representing the encounters of Amor Divinus or Divine Love and the Soul. These books were acceptable to moderate Catholics and protestants because they promoted the general tenets of the Christian life, not controversial doctrines."

³⁸ The image, modelled on the frontispiece of the anonymous Jesuit collection *Typus Mundi*, is fully discussed by Hölting (1986: 33 ff.).

Stylistics and Emblematics

which comments on the image, guides the reader's fruition, and explains the meaning of the various elements, as if any increase in processing effort would inevitably yield misunderstandings.³⁹

The cost of the long *subscriptio* and the Latin captions is mitigated by the fact that they all allude to the same meaning and reinforce one another without producing any weak implicature:⁴⁰ even the Vergilian quotation within the image (*Maiora Canamus*) does not trigger off any further implication, but it is simply evoked in its devotional potential (the IV eclogue has traditionally been read from a Christological perspective as a description of the Golden Age) to strengthen the central moral message. Optimal relevance is then assured because there is only one possible interpretation that can come to mind, the first and only one that all the various parts of the emblem focus on.

³⁹ It is worth remembering that each emblem typically presents a Biblical quotation as its title, together with a picture, a longish comment, one or more meditations from the Church Fathers, a final epigram, all focussing on the central theme of the emblem.

⁴⁰ As Hölting (2008) stresses, though Quarles' poems show a certain originality, they basically "exploit the mimetic quality of the pictures and transform them into allegories of spiritual truth." and "The overall structure of the work preserves patterns of the spiritual pilgrimage and the Ignatian meditation."



from Francis Quarles, *Emblemes*, (1635)

The composition, however, is not only at pains to secure the right interpretation of symbols and figures: it is also conceived as an interpellation practice with a clear ideological slant: the two names that stand out on the globe, Finchinfeild (i.e. Finchingfield) and Roxwell, are both associated with Quarles,⁴¹ while the signature of the famous artist and engraver William Marshall is evident under the motto. Thus, while the upper Latin captions and the motto set the devotional tone of the emblem, the names in the lower section

⁴¹ Quarles' *Emblemes* were dedicated to Edward Benlowes, who lived in Finchingfield, while the writer himself lived in the nearby village of Roxwell. On this see Hill (1985).

Stylistics and Emblematics

reassert its more material aspect through an explicit reference to writer, patron, and artist.

These two apparently contrasting forces, in fact, reinforce each other's ideological bearing on the reader: on the one side he is asked to despise the contingent, material elements of life; on the other, he is reminded of the concrete nature of the emblem as a visible token of the real people who created it; on the one side, he must not indulge in appreciating an aesthetically pleasant object but just use it as a mere stimulus that through the *compositio loci* can help him refine his thoughts and desires; on the other, the names are there to stress that it was Quarles (not an unknown writer) to compose the poem, and that it was Marshall (not a minor apprentice) who engraved the image, a sort of warning not to dismiss the composition as a negligible artistic achievement.

The overall effect is to set the reader in an unbearable position, to convince him of the irreconcilable forces (and passions) that pull him in opposite directions, to present his annihilation and transformation as a pressing, inescapable necessity: the long *subscriptio* accompanying the image culminates in an urgent request with an unmistakable ideological flavour, when the speaking voice addressing Christ asks (Quarles 1635: 2):

O cleanse my crafty Soul
From secret crimes, and let my thoughts controul
My thoughts: O teach me stoutly to deny
My self, that I may be no longer I.
Enrich my Fancie, clarify my thoughts,
Refine my dross...

The moment of maximum identification with Christ significantly coincides with the maximum of man's depersonalisation, a process which is confirmed by the insistence on the antinomic metaphors of filthiness and cleanliness in the *subscriptio* (strewn with such terms as *dust*, *dunghill*, *gross*, *lapsed*, *frail*, *sinful*, *leprous*, *scurf'd*, as opposed to *cleanse*, *clarify*, *refine*). Once again, the thorough coding of objects, or the presence of captions, impose a strong implicature, a univocal, immediately accessible interpretation that prevents the

reader from processing the text in a different way; at the same time, the pervasive guidance of the reader, and his repeated exposure to the contrasting strains of transcending and lingering on the emblem in its objecthood, mean that he is at the centre of an interpellation practice that surreptitiously aims at moulding him into an obedient subject.

The evolution of emblematics has traditionally been described in terms of loss, distortion, or betrayal of the original hieroglyphical nature when it was used for religious or didactic purposes. By approaching emblematics from a stylistic perspective, however, it is possible to describe this evolution more correctly as a change in relevance paradigms and practices, as the progressive shift from opening up interpretations by a great number of weak implicatures to imposing more and more necessary interpretations through strong implicatures. This has a relevant bearing on our interpretation of XVII-century English textuality from a cultural and ideological point of view. The progressive passage from lesser to more constraining texts, or from more inferential to more coded forms of communication, had not only hermeneutic consequences, but deviously imposed a new practice of interpellation to transform the inadvertent reader into a pliant, submissive *subjectus*.

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Daniele Borgogni

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Typvs Mvndi, in quo eius calamitates et pericvla nec non diuini, humanique amoris antipathia, emblematicè proponuntur à rr.c.s.i.a., Antverpiae apud ioan. Cnobbaert, 1627

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