"SPEAKING PICTURES": WAYS OF SEEING AND READING IN ENGLISH RENAISSANCE CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Neither in Antiquity nor in the Middle Ages could literary theory settle the debate about the primacy of inspiration or imitation, Plato or Aristotle. It was in the Renaissance that serious efforts were made to reconcile the two theories, and one of the best syntheses came from England. Philosophical and aesthetical syncretism between Plato and Aristotle makes Sidney's *Defense of Poesie* a non-dogmatic and particularly inspiring foundation for English literary theory. Also, Philip Sidney's notion of "speaking pictures" needs to be revisited, in view of the ontology and epistemology of art, as a ground-breaking model for understanding the multimediality of cultural representations. The first part of the following essay is devoted to this. Furthermore, it will be examined how Sidney's visual poetics influenced and at the same time represented emblematic ways of seeing and thinking in Elizabethan culture. These are particularly conspicuous in the influence of emblem theory in England and in Renaissance literary practice related to that. In the final section I intend to show that Shakespeare's intriguing, although implicit, poetics is a telling example of how Renaissance visual culture enabled a model that put equal stress on inspiration and imitation, and also on the part of the audience, whose imagination had (and still has) to work in cooperation with the author's intention.

Keywords: English Renaissance; poetics; Philip Sidney; Shakespeare; speaking pictures.

1. Inspiration, imitation, and speaking pictures in Sidney

In his *Defense of Poesie*, Philip Sidney pondered the origins and the mediality of art. By examining the etymology of the word *poet*, he emphasized in an

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Aristotelian spirit the craftsman-character: "it cometh of this word *poiein*, which is *to make*" (*Defense*, sec. 8, 411), but equally emphasized, via Plato, the inspirational and creative faculties of that maker "when with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth..." (*Defense*, sec. 11, 413). Later, when introducing the concept of "speaking pictures", he also paved the way for ensuing theories about the multimediality of culture, a notion so important in today's critical thinking.

The amalgamation of visuality and textuality flourished as a longstanding tradition already in the English Middle Ages, in such diverse forms as heraldry, the *Biblia pauperum* tradition and illustrated Apocalypse, the widely popular *Physiologus*, as well as the various representations of the dance of death.[2] The Renaissance initiated a new phase in this multimedial (image/text-based) representational logic. The rediscovery of classical medals and other inscribed objects as well as the neoclassical fashion of epigrams led to the rise of the emblem, a special hybrid genre combining motto, picture, and text. After the first proper emblem book, Alciato's *Emblematum Liber* (1531), the genre became extremely popular in Europe, and the fashion – together with the sister genre of imprese – also spilled over to Britain.[3] It should be emphasized, however, that Philip Sidney and his *Defense* in one way or another inspired the English edition of Paolo Govio's *Delle Imprese* by Samuel Daniel in 1585; Geoffrey Whitney's *A Choice of Emblems*, the first proper English emblem book (1586); the further popularizing *Theater of Fine Devices* (Guillaume de la Perrière's emblems translated into English by Thomas Combe around 1593); and the early theoretical works of Abraham Fraunce, published in 1588.[4]

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[2]   On heraldry see Neubecker, *Heraldik. Wappen: Ihr Ursprung, Sinn und Wert* (1977), and Fox-Davies, *A Complete Guide to Heraldry* (1978). On the *Biblia pauperum* see Schmidt, *Die Armenbibeln des XVI. Jahrhunderts* (1959); Labriola & Smeltz (eds.), *The Bible of the Poor* (1990). On the illustrated apocalypse, see Morgan, *Picturing the End of the World* (2007). On the *Physiologus*, see Squires (ed.), *The Old English Physiologus* (1988); Sbordone (ed.), *Physiologus* (1991 [1936]). On the *danse macabre*, Gertsman, *The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages* (2010); Knoell Oosterwijk, *Mixed Metaphors: The Danse Macabre in Medieval and Early Modern Euro*pe (2011).

[3]   For Alciato, see Green (ed.), *Andreae Alciato Emblematum* (1871); Held (ed.), *[Alciati] Liber emblematum* (2007). Of the enormous related scholarly literature see Michael Bath, *Speaking Pictures* (1994); Daly, "Shakespeare and the Emblem" (1984); "Where Are We Going in Studies of Iconography and Emblematics?" (1996); Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem* (1998 [1979]); Daly et al. (eds.), *The English Emblem Tradition* (1988–1993); Daly (ed.), *A Companion to Emblem Studies* (2008); Freeman, *English Emblem Books* (1948); Russell, "Emblems and Hieroglyphics" (1988); Russell, "Illustration, Hieroglyph, Icon" (2002).

[4]   For relevant modern studies of Sidney's *Defense*, see Kennan, *Sidney Defending Poetry* (1990), and Mack, *Sidney's Poetics: Imitating Creation* (2005).

In his *Apology for Poetrie*, Philip Sidney pondered the origins and the mediality of art. By examining the etymology of the word *poet*, he emphasized in an Aristotelian spirit the craftsman-character ('it cometh of this word *poiein*, which is *to make*'), but equally emphasized, via Plato, the inspirational and creative faculties of that maker ('when with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth...'). Later, when introducing the concept of 'speaking pictures', he also paved the way for ensuing theories about the multimediality of culture.

While bearing in mind the long-lasting influence of Sidney's *Defense*, the cornerstones of his theory could be also examined in the larger context of literary criticism, beginning with the ancient Greek philosophers, primarily Plato and Aristotle, who developed sophisticated theories about cultural representations. Plato's conceptualization of inspiration relied on the idea of a sacred madness or ecstasy, which brings about the encounter with the divine and enables the poet to show some glimpses of the world of ideas through revelatory and intuitive knowledge, otherwise incomprehensible to rational, discursive thinking. The Neoplatonic *expressive theories* span the history of literary theory from Antiquity, through the Renaissance concepts of "divine frenzy", to Romantic genius-theories and James Joyce's "epiphany".[5] One of the most engaging descriptions of inspiration is to be found in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

> Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
> Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
> More than cool reason ever comprehends.
> The lunatic, the lover and the poet
> Are of imagination all compact:
> ….
> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.
>
> (A Midsummer Night's Dream, 5.1.5–19)[6]

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[5] The term *expressive theories* is from M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and Critical Tradition* (1953). These ideas are to be found in Plato's *Phaedrus*, 244a–245a; *Symposium*, 209a–ff., *Ion*, and the *Apology of Socrates* (22). A classic survey of the Neoplatonic trend of "expressive theories" is Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory* (1975 [1924]).

[6] All Shakespeare quotations are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, edited by G. Blakemore Evans (1974).

Aristotle was more interested in the structure and the subject-matter of literary works, and his theory of *mimesis* has also had an unshakeable role in the history of Western literary theory.[7] Its essence was again perfectly summarized by Shakespeare's Hamlet:

> … the purpose of playing, whose end,
> both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere,
> the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature,
> scorn her own image, and the very age and body
> of the time his form and pressure.
>
> (*Hamlet*, 3.2.24–28)

It is most likely that Shakespeare never read Plato's dialogues or Aristotle's *Poetics*, but it is interesting to ponder whether he knew Sidney's *Apology*, considering his connections with Penshurst. In any case, his intuitions are remarkable. If it is true that the history of philosophy is nothing but footnotes to Plato and Aristotle (as Alfred North Whitehead remarked), the best way to start examining English Renaissance literary philosophy is through the most important of these footnotes, written by Philip Sidney. In his *Defense of Poesie* we find the groundwork about inspiration and imitation as well as about the multimediality of culture, an idea that was rooted in the premodern emblematic way of thinking and seeing. In return, these theories fostered the emblematic and the dramatic practices of the English Renaissance.

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Literary historians sometimes call 1579 an *annus mirabilis* in English literature. This is the year when Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives* was published. It brought home important historical-political and ethical themes of Antiquity so important for Renaissance ideology, and, at the same time, greatly contributed to the formation of the modern English idiom. Furthermore, it was the year Stephen Gosson published his *School of Abuse* to stigmatize poetry as "an instructor of immorality" (Legouis & Casamian 1971: 253). This, in turn, provoked a revolution in literature as well as in criticism, associated with the name of the *Areopagus* group. Its members called for a general apology for literature, poetry as well as drama, furthermore, they wanted to reform literary expression following the models of Antiquity. The new programme of vernacular literature was put forward by Edmund Spenser in a letter to Gabriel Harvey declaring that they should give up "old style" rhyming and introduce classical forms and topics in literature:

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[7]   For the history and variety of mimetic theories see Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1953).

> Now they have proclaimed in their *areos pagos*, a generall surceasing and silence
> of balde Rymers, and also of the very beste to: in steade whereof, they haue by
> authoritie of their whole Senate, prescribed certaine Lawes and rules of Quantities
> of English sillables, for English verse.
>
> (Spenser, as quoted in Smith & Selingcourt 1970: 635)

The first spectacular result of this revolution was Spenser's *The Shepheards Calender*, published still in 1579, which testified not only to an effort to create classical literary forms and metrics in English (although in the latter it was not satisfactory), but also offered a multimedial, textual, and visual *Gesamtkunstwerk*. It had illustrations, each showing shepherds (the lyrical selves of the eclogues) in their environment of the changing seasons of the year – these are not strictly emblematic pictures, however intrigue the reader to find connections between the image and the content of the ensuing poem (see Figure 1: "October"). Furthermore, each poem is concluded by an explanatory "Gloss", and an "Emblem" – in this case not an image, but a word emblem (see below) with a reference to classical literature related to the main theme of the eclogues. "October" is about poetic inspiration and Spenser's "Emblem" refers to Ovid's version of the Narcissus myth in *Fasti* VI, 5–6: "... agitante calescimus illo," that is "There is a god within us. / It is when he stirs us that our bosom warms; it is his impulse that sows the seeds of inspiration."[8]

Although unpublished at the time, Philip Sidney's contribution to the Areopagus was his *Old Arcadia*, a pastoral novel interspersed with classical elegies and enriched with lavish imagery, foreshadowing his concept of "speaking pictures" in the *Apology* (written in 1581 but published only in 1595). No doubt, this interest in visuality was also inspired by John Lyly's *Euphues*, an early stylistic *tour-de-force*, published just a year earlier.

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[8] Trans. Sir James George Frazer. See https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Ovid (accessed on 4 September 2016). Spenser's own explanation runs as follows: "Hereby is meant, as also in the whole course of this Eglogue, that Poetry is a diuine instinct and vnnatural rage passing the reache of comen reason. Whom Piers answereth Epiphonematicos as admiring the excellencye of the skyll whereof in Cuddie hee hadde alreadye hadde a taste". See the *Shepheards Calender* in the University of Oregon's Renaissance Editions: https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/833/shepheardes.pdf?sequence=1 (accessed on 4 September 2016).
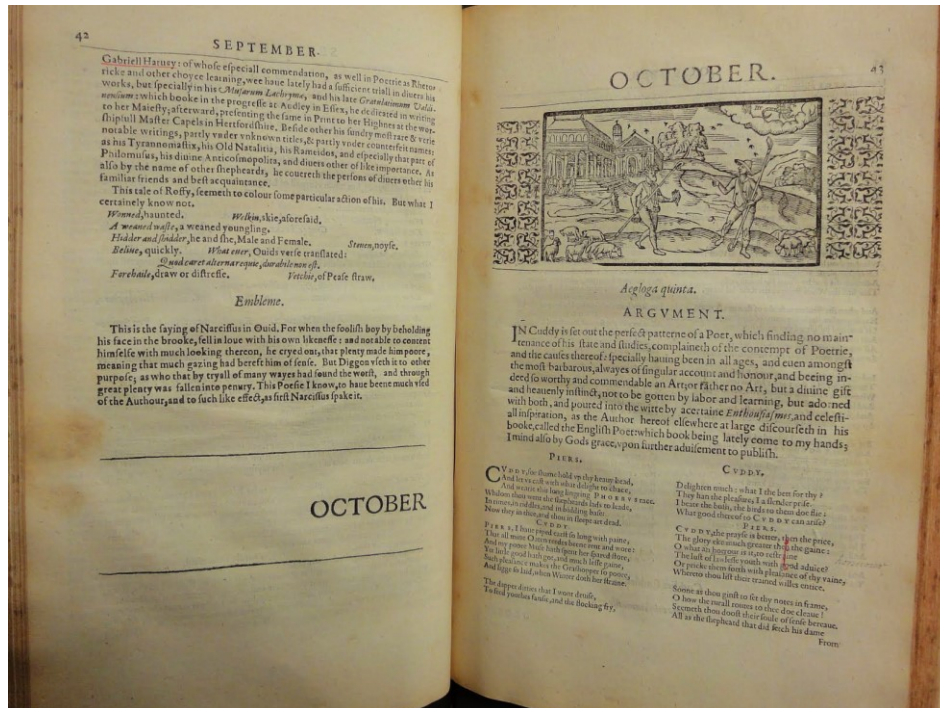
Fig. 1. A page from Spenser's The shepheardes calender. London: Hugh Singleton, (1579). Image available: facsimile edition and introduction by H. Oskar Sommer, London: John Nimmo, 1890.

Before looking into Sidney's theory, a reminder is due: neither Spenser nor Sidney fulfilled their classical literary program entirely. To begin with, Spenser's eclogues were not written in classical metrics, neither did Sidney's poems in the *Old Arcadia* follow the classical models. The latter even included songs of medieval origin and complicated sestinas. It seems that pure literary classicism in the English Renaissance was a short-lived theoretical programme, and it soon gave way to a more mixed, contemporary, European, and, at the same time, nationalistic poetics in which the home-bread late medieval traditions were as effective as the modern Italian and Spanish models (Szőnyi 2012: 108). This formal liberalism contributed to literature's sensitivity toward the visual, and while – with the exception of portraits and the miniature limnings – Puritanism did not allow such a flowering of painting as took place in the Catholic countries, English literature made up for that shortage with emblems and "speaking pictures". This Medieval-Renaissance synthesis was attempted in Sidney's *New Arcadia* and Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*.

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Philosophical and aesthetical syncretism between Plato and Aristotle makes Sidney's *Apology* a non-dogmatic and particularly inspiring foundation for English literary theory. First of all, Sidney takes the stand for the Platonic concept of inspiration, which led the Florentine Neoplatonists to speak about the possible deification of man, a process through which the magus and the artist became creative geniuses, partners of God:

> [Man is to give] right honor to the heavenly maker of that maker, who, having made man to his own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature; which is nothing he showeth so much as in poetry, when with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth ...
>
> (*Defense*, sec. 11, 413)

Even more exciting is his conceptual understanding of imitation, which follows Aristotle not in a limited sense, as most readers (mis)understood the Greek thinker, but with full compatibility of the twenty-fifth section of the *Poetics*:

> Since the poet is an imitator, like a painter or any other maker of likenesses, he must carry out his imitations on all occasions in one of three possible ways. Thus, he must imitate 1/ the things that were in the past or are now; 2/ or that people say and think to be; 3/ or those things that ought to be.
>
> (*Poetics*, sec. 25, 135)[9]

The second of the above three points is usually neglected by the commentators. Next to "realistic" and "idealistic" imitation, Aristotle also allows the imitation of what people "say and think to be", that is, any kind of fantasy, the fruits of the imagination. Sidney paraphrases this as follows:

> Only the poet, … lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow into another Nature, in making things either better than Nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms *such as never were in Nature, as the Heros, Demigods, Cyclops*, and such like; so as he goes hand in hand with Nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts but freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit. Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done, neither with so pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, not whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.
>
> (Defense, sec. 9, 412–413; emphasis mine)

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[9]   Aristotle, *Poetics*, in *Classical Literary Criticism. Translations and Interpretations*, ed. by Alex Preminger, Leon Golden, O. B. Hardison & Kevin Kerrane (1974: 135).

Not only the legitimacy to create fantastic products of the imagination is engaging here, but also the strongly visual language: the detailed tapestry of a golden world within the zodiac of poetical wit. There are limits to human creative energies because of the Original Sin: "[As a consequence of] that first accursed fall of Adam, our *erected wit* makes us know what perfection is, and yet our *infected will* keepeth us from reaching unto it" (*Defense*, sec. 11, 414; emphasis mine). Nevertheless, poetry is elevated to the sacred status of the Scriptures: in its very nature it is opposed to worldliness, "it is the newly appointed heaven of human invention and endeavour" (Habib 2005: 266). These are evidences of Sidney's Platonism, but, as has been indicated, in his definition of poetry he also creatively used Aristotle's concept of *mimesis*:

> Poesy therefore is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the word *mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth – to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture.
>
> (*Defense*, sec. 12, 414; emphasis mine)

When he compares the poet's skills with that of the philosopher, the "speaking picture" refers not only to the power of poetry, but also to the multimediality of representations. He claims that the real poetical power of the mind is to work with images, whereas the philosopher offers only "wordish" descriptions. He suggests that, while ordinary language cannot successfully conjure up a rhinoceros or a gorgeous palace, the "speaking pictures" of the poet are equal with those of the visualizations of the painter. As Horace said: *ut pictura poesis*.

> For to a man that had never seen an elephant or a rhinoceros, who should tell him all their shapes, color, bigness and particular marks; or of a gorgeous palace an architector, who declaring the full beauties might well make the hearer able to repeat, yet, should never satisfy his inward conceit with being witness to itself of a true lively knowledge; but the same man, as soon as he might see those beasts well painted, or the house well in model, should straightways grow without need of any description to a judicial comprehending of them. So no doubt, the philosopher with his learned definitions replenisheth the memory with many infallible grounds of wisdom, which notwithstanding lie dark before the imaginative and judging power, if they be not illuminated or figured forth by the speaking picture of poesy.
>
> (*Defense*, sec. 21, 421)

At this point the circle closes up and we are back to Neoplatonic mysticism again, which, with Plotinus, claimed the primacy of the image over the word: "It must not be thought that in the Intelligible World the gods and the blessed see propositions; everything is expressed there is a beautiful image" – as we read in the *Enneads*.[10]

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[10]   *Ennead*, V.8 [5], quoted and commented by Gombrich, "Icones symbolicae" (1978 [1948]:

The above analysis of the *Apology* leads to the twofold conclusion according to which Sidney successfully managed to harmonize the quite different views of Plato and Aristotle about the nature and purpose of literature. It is also noteworthy that he distilled notions from both philosophers to highlight the importance of the visual, be it revelatory inspiration or imitative imagination. The rest of this paper will be devoted to the examination of how this multimedial syncretism informed poetical as well as dramatic representations during the last decades of the English Renaissance.

2. The philosophy of emblematics in Renaissance England

It is obvious that there was something in the general perception of life that created intensive interest in emblems and imprese on the continent as well as in England. These two genres proliferated and had their theoreticians, mostly Italian and French, such as Paolo Giovio, Alessandro Farra, Luca Contile, Guillaume de la Perrière, but also the German Nicolaus Reusner and the Hungarian Johannes Sambucus. The author of the first English emblem book, Geoffrey Whitney, did not go into intricate conceptual details. However, he pointed out those everyday contexts which fostered the emblematic way of seeing:

> [Emblems] properlie meant by suche figures, or workes, as are wrought in plate, or in stones in the pavementes, or on the waulles, or such like, for the adorning of the place; having some wittie devise expressed with cunning woorkemanship, something obscure to be perceived at the first, whereby, when with further consideration it is understood, it maie the greater delighte the beholder. And although the worde [emblem] dothe comprehende manie thinges, and divers matters maie be therein contained, yet all Emblemes maie be reduced into these three kindes, which is *Historicall, Naturall, & Morall*.
>
> (Whitney 1586: 2)[11]

Claude Paradin, whose work in English translation became the second emblem book on the isles (1591), referred to Egyptian hieroglyphics as a pertinent model:

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258). The text, in Marsilio Ficino's 15th-century Latin translation, is: "Nemo igitur existimare debet in mundo intelligibili vel deos ipsos, vel habitatores illic alios plusquam felices ibi quasdam propositionum regulas contemplari, sed singula, quae illic esse dicintur, velut exemplaria quaedam et spectacula pulchra intuentibus se offere...", *Plotini Enneades cum Marsilii Ficini interpretatione castigata*, edited by Creuzer & Moser (1835: 353).

[11] Critical edition: Daly et al. (eds.) (1988–1998), vol. 1: 79–339. Early print edition: Green, *Whitney's Choice of Emblems* (1866). Online facsimile of Green's edition: https://archive.org/details/whitneyschoicee00paragoog (accessed on 12 August 2015).

> And in so doing as the olde Aegyptians were wont to express their intentes and meanings by their Hieroglyphicall letters: so hope I by this meanes so stirre up diverse men to the apprehension and love of virtue ...
>
> (Paradin 1591, "Greetings": 3–4)[12]

De la Perrière, another French emblematist, translated into English in 1593, also referred to hieroglyphics:

> Emblems are in account and singular regard, but it hath bene of ancient times and almost from the beginning of the world: for the Egyptians before the use of letters, wrote by figures and images, as well as of men, beasts, fowles, and fishes, as of serpents, thereby expressing their intentions...
>
> (Perrière 1614: A4v)[13]

De la Perrière's translator, Thomas Combe, further elucidated the use of emblems as follows:

> Pictures that especially are discerned by the sense, are such helps to the weakness of common understanding, that they make words as it were deedes, and set the whole substance of that which is offered before the sight and conceipt of the Reader.
>
> (Perrière 1614: A5r.)

One of the most learned and original emblematists in the Elizabethan period was Abraham Fraunce, a client of the Sidneys who dedicated most of his books to Philip, to his younger brother, Robert (an accomplished poet himself), and to their sister, Mary, Countess of Pembroke. Fraunce attended Shrewsbury School, where Philip also studied, then proceeded to Cambridge, his studies partly financed by Philip. He later became closely associated with the Penshurst circle, apparently also advising Mary to stage her closet drama, *Antonie*, for a small domestic location (Findlay 2006: 23). Two of his chief printed works appeared in 1588, one in English, *The Arcadian Rhetorike: Or The Praecepts of Rhetorike made plaine by examples...*, another in Latin, an

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[12] Critical edition: Daly et al. (eds.) (1988–1998: 3–245), *The English Emblem Tradition*, vol. 2; Digital edition: Penn State English Emblem Project, https://collection1.libraries.psu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/emblem/id/2284 (accessed on 12 August 2015). Although Paradin's book contains strictly speaking "devices", connecting the two-part pieces to individual personalities, the quoted introduction points to the general moralizing nature of the emblems.

[13] For the French original (*Theatre des bons engins*, Paris, 1540), see the Glasgow project: https://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/french/books.php?id=FLPa (accessed on 10 January 2016). The only surviving copy in English is from 1614, however, the manuscript was entered in the Stationers' Register in 1593 and it is thought that there had to be an earlier printing, too. See Freeman, *English Emblem Books* (1948: 63).

important theoretical work about philosophical symbolism, *Insignium, armorum, emblematum, hieroglyphicorum et symbolorum explicatio*.

Around 1590 he reworked the latter, concentrating on the genre of imprese, titled *Symbolicae philosophiae liber quartus et ultimus*, which remained in manuscript, probably meant as a personal gift to Robert Sidney.[14] In this work he first gave a general theoretical introduction about symbolic imprese, then outlined a historiographical description of Italian works on the subject and compared their models and criteria; finally, he presented a collection of imprese from various parts of Europe to illustrate the genre. This section was closed by two imprese devised by himself for the late Philip Sidney and here he added explanations, thus, developing the imprese into quasi-complete emblems.

In general, he suggested that a symbol is "the means by which we infer and know something" (Fraunce 1991: 3). But imprese are special symbols, just as emblems: "An impresa is a certain body comprising an image and a motto which is adapted to portray a distinguished and noble idea conceived within the mind" (Fraunce 1991: 25). Emblems differ from imprese by being tripartite: the motto and the *pictura* are completed by a *scriptura*, or poem.[15] Fraunce also subscribed to the general agreement according to which their purpose was to represent an idea "achieved by means of a certain resemblance" demonstrated in a complex way through picture and words, the motto being "clear, concise, to the point, and witty" (Fraunce 1991: 29). Normally, this was meant that they were intended for the intelligent and informed reader, not too obscure on the one hand, but also not too self-evident. Thus it was strongly advised that the text should not simply describe the picture, rather, it should drive the mind from a different direction to the same notion.

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[14]   Kent Country Archive Office, MS U1475Z16. Its modern edition and translation is Abraham Fraunce, *Symbolicae Philosophiae Liber Quartus et Ultimus* (1991), edited and with an introduction by John Manning, translated by Estelle Haan.

[15]   This is an often cited differentiation between imprese and emblems, based on structural criteria, however in reality the situation is more complex. One has to take into the consideration the general aim of the genres as well as their intended audience.

Fig. 2. In Astrologos. Emblem 28 in Geoffrey Whitney's A choice of emblems (London, 1586). Reproduced from Henry Green's 1867 facsimile edition.

To explain the representational logic of emblems a suitable example is the popular theme, "In Astrologos". An English rendering can be found in Geoffrey Whitney's collection, *A Choice of Emblems* (see Figure 2). The feelings induced by the Latin motto "About the astrologers" on the reader will vary depending on what (s)he thinks about astrology and its practitioners. When the eye moves downward to the picture, a surprise may come. Familiarity with classical mythology makes it easy to recognize in the falling man the heedless and unfortunate Icarus whose waxen wings melted and his experiment with flying came to a disaster. But what is the relationship between the astrologers and Icarus? The third part, the poem, explains this, although with a delay, because the first stanza only recounts what happened to Icarus:

> Heare, ICARUS with mountinge up alofte,
> Came headlonge downe, and fell into the Sea:
> His waxed winges, the sonne did make so softe,

They melted straighte, and feathers fell awaie:
  So, whilste he flewe, and of no dowbte did care,
  He moov'de his armes, but loe, the same were bare.

Let suche beware, which paste theire reache doe mounte,
Whoe seeke the thinges, to mortall men deny'de,
And searche the Heavens, and all the starres accoumpte,
And tell therebie, what after shall betyde:
  With blusshinge nowe, theire weakenesse rightlie weye,
  Least as they clime, they fall to theire decaye.

(Whitney 1586: 28)

From the second stanza we learn that, as Icarus overreached his possibilities and aspired for something that was denied to mortals, so the astrologers are searching the sky and looking for illicit knowledge. This reveals that in this moral emblem the astrologers are not presented as cheaters, as one might expect, but as overreachers whose overweening pride will result in failure. From this example one can deduce the two most important characteristic features of the emblem. On the one hand, it employs figurative or symbolic ambiguity, meaning that the signs used do not stand for themselves but call to mind something else based on an associative ground of similarity (in this case Icarus personifies the arrogant *superbia* of the astrologers). On the other hand, the emblem also employs multimediality: the intentional ambiguity is communicated visually and verbally.

Since the 1990s "emblem studies" have undergone enormous development and one of the most debated questions has been the definition of the emblem. Some aspects of this ongoing international debate has bearing on the interpretation of early modern culture in general, the perception of the Elizabethan age in particular. The voluminous works of Michael Bath, Peter Daly, David Graham, Daniel Russell, Alison Saunders[16] and others have focused on questions of structure, function, and usage of the emblems and according to these different aspects emphasized different characteristic features as well as different cultural contexts. For my personal interest those features are particularly intriguing which allow the enlargement of the concept "emblem" into an "emblematic way of seeing and thinking", that is, trying to identify a representational logic and a way of perception characteristic for the premodern world and sharply different from our own. To understand this, a study by Daniel Russell can facilitate us.

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[16] See Note 3, also Graham, "Assembling, Being, Embodying" (2019 [forthcoming]); Alison Saunders, *Picta Poesis: The Relationship Between Figure and Text in the 16th Century French Emblem Book* (1986).

The Renaissance created an important transition when the methods of empirical observation were only being introduced. Empiricism joined but did not wipe out "Tradition". Proverbial lore, Christian and Classical traditions established authority different from the scientific truths. This mix of perspectives prevented (as has always prevented even up to now) people from "seeing" images in their naturalness, because our seeing – which is more than perception, it is a cognitive capability – works according to socially constructed rules. This general thesis is supported by many examples in Daniel Russell's studies when he systematically argues that seeing and perception are separated by "believing".[17]

Another important proposition of Russell's explains the special process of reading which early modern users applied to interpreting emblems. He calls this "scanning," suggesting that the emblem pictures were not perceived in their entirety as a unified vision, rather the users scanned them, building up the meaning step by step. He relates this to "oral imagination", also studied by Marshal McLuhan and Walter J. Ong, by which following a linear procedure the viewer would use variable strategies to create connections among the elements, usually between two at a time (Russell 1988: 82). According to Russell we should call this technique "quasi-literacy" and the structure of a picture produced by it resembles the structure of dialogues or orally presented riddles. Consequently, "if we moderns find some other way of viewing the picture more "natural" or compelling, and feel obliged to take account of these traits, there is no good reason to suppose that contemporaries did so, too" (Russell 1988: 82).

Fig. 3. Pro Lege et pro grege. Emblem from George Wither, A Collection of Emblems (1635: 154); adopted from Gabriel Rollenhag, Nucleus emblemata (Arnheim, 1611), Emblem 134.

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[17]   Russell, "Emblems and Hieroglyphics" (1988) and "Illustration, Hieroglyph, Icon" (2002).

Due to this "scanning technique", the early modern viewer of images perceived pictures as mosaic-like and attributed much greater importance to details than to the whole. At this point we may remember Heinrich Wölfflin's famous juxtaposition of the Renaissance and Baroque pictorial styles, the former establishing coordination the latter subordination among its elements.[18] Russell illustrates this complexity by Rollenhag's Emblem 134, "Pro lege et pro grege".[19] The picture shows the well-known pelican image while self-sacrificingly feeding his/her youngsters with his/her own blood (see Figure 3). Because of this, the pelican was usually associated with the self-sacrificing Christ. To amplify the association, in the background there is a scene of the crucifixion, on the top of the cross there also sits a small pelican. The viewer then is surprised by the motto – "For the law and for the flock" –, while the *subscriptio* refers to a prince, who is ready to sacrifice himself for his people: "Dux, vitam, bonus, et pro lege, et pro grege ponit, / Haec veluti pullos sanguine spargit avis". The background configuration suggests "how the emblematist wanted his readers to understand the unexpected analogy between the self-sacrificing pelican and a commonplace lesson for the prince who aspires to be a good leader" (Russell 1988: 78).[20] In George Wither's English rendering the motto runs: "Our Pelican, by bleeding, thus / Fulfill'd the Law, and cured Us." However, in Wither's lengthy poem there is no mention of the earthly prince, his argument only explains the analogy between the bird and Christ thus eliminating most of the intellectual challenge of his model emblem.

3. Mythological traditions and the emblematic way of thinking/seeing

In *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* (1972 [1940]), Jean Seznec detailed how classical mythology reached the Renaissance. He identified four traditions. First, the *historical tradition* suggested that the gods were the precursors of civilization, and from the later Middle Ages many royal houses sought their origins among them. Secondly, the *physical tradition* saw the gods as figures for natural and celestial entities. Third, the *moral tradition* considered pagan mythology as ethical allegories for human conduct and thus becoming raw material for emblems and hieroglyphics. For example, the sixth-century Fulgentius interpreted Virgil's *Aeneid* as a Christian spiritual journey, and the very popular anonymous *Ovid moralisé* was a similar collection. Finally, the *encyclopaedic tradition* combined the first three and with an ethnographic interest collected and described

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[18]   See Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History. The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art* (1950 [1915]).

[19]   See Gabriel Rollenhag, *Nucleus Emblematum Selectissimorum* (1611); English adaptation: George Wither, *A Collection of Emblemes, Ancient and Moderne* (1635: 154).

[20]   See also Peil (1992: 272), "Emblem Types in Gabriel Rollenhagen's *Nucleus emblematum*".

the *panopticum* of pagan gods. In the second part of his book, Seznec discussed the stylistics of Renaissance representations: "The true role of the Italian Renaissance in relation to the mythological material transmitted by the Middle Ages lies in restoring classical form" (Seznec 1972 [1940]: vi). The third part of the book deals with the science of mythology in the sixteenth century, with the theories regarding the use of mythology, and the influence of the encyclopaedic manuals in Italy and other European countries. The forerunner was Boccaccio's *Genealogia deorum gentilium* (1360–1374), and the three most important Renaissance handbooks were: Lilio Gregorio Giraldi's *De deis gentium varia et multiplex historia* (Basel, 1548); Natale Conti''s *Mythologiae sive explicationis fabularum* (Venice, 1551); and Vincenzo Cartari's *Sposizione degli dei degli antichi* (Venice, 1556). These works boosted interest and provided programmatic raw material for artists as well as poets of the Renaissance.

Stepping beyond Seznec's encyclopaedic survey, Jane Kingsley-Smith has provided useful explanations on how and why the knowledge of classical mythology had become necessary for a mass English readership by the end of the sixteenth century.[21] She highlights the English propagators and their translations belonging to this tradition, such as Arthur Golding's *Metamorphoses* (1567), Stephen Batman's *The Golden Book of the Leaden Gods* (1577), or Abraham Fraunce's *The Countess of Pembroke's Ivychurch* (1591). These helped to create an atmosphere in which poets who strived to be successful considered it necessary to be up to date in symbolic mythologizing, as in 1598 John Marston wrote with self-mockery:

> Reach me some Poets' Index ...
> *Imagines Deorum*. Book of Epithets,
> Natalis Comes, thou I know recites,
> And mak'st Anatomy of Poesie,
> Help to unmask the Satyr's secrecy.
>
>   (See Marston 1764; quoted by Kingsley-Smith 2010: 136)

The greatest novelty in Kingsley-Smith's study is that she widens the cultural horizon from literary works to social practices that amplified the overall influence of this mythological-symbolic-emblematic heritage.[22] She mentions two important Italian customs behind the process of popularization. By the fifteenth century, due to systematic archaeological research in Italy, the knowledge of the classical visualizations of the pagan gods became widespread, which was supported by rediscovered ancient texts that described this

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[21]   Kingsley-Smith, *Mythology* (2010: 134–50).
[22]   This heavily relies on Malcolm Bull, *The Mirror of the Gods: Classical Mythology in Renaissance Art* (2005).

iconography (such as Philostratus' *Imagines*).[23] These visual topoi – together with the fables and stories behind them – became immediately popularized by the leading artists, such as Botticelli, Michelangelo, Rafael. While these artists were mostly working for the private quarters of the popes or some dukes, smaller workshops were busy spreading these themes among a wider audience, and the topics spread from high art to applied art.

A notable example is the fifteenth-century habit of presenting bridal couples with wedding chests (*cassoni*) richly decorated with images, originally scenes from the Old Testament but increasingly with erotic references to Greco-Roman mythology.[24] While these representations spread to other household objects, such as birth trays, boxes, and majolica pottery, there was a growing demand for monumental art, too, at the same time becoming accessible to new social strata, especially town-dwelling burghers. These were the frescoes in public places such as town- and guild-halls or law courts; tapestries in similar venues; allegorical fountains in city squares, statues, decorations on houses, etc.[25] Last, but not least, intangible customs and rituals also contributed to educating the people about mythological and emblematic symbolization: festivities, processions, *intermezzi*, royal and civic entries, triumphal and funeral marches among other public ceremonies heavily used symbolic and emblematic iconography.[26] In the light of the above developments of the various (and often multimedial) cultural representations, I continue now to define the general features of the emblematic way of seeing and thinking.[27]

One of the medieval traditions inspiring emblematic symbolism was the notion that everything in the world had multiple meanings: a conclusion medieval thinkers came to while reading the "Book of Nature". In the eleventh century Hugh of Saint Victor added a powerful metaphor to the exegetical understanding of the universe in his treatise *De Tribus Diebus (On the Three Days)*, in which he offered an exegetical understanding of the whole created world. As he wrote,

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[23] Philostratus the Elder was a Greek writer (3rd century AD) whose *Imagines* contained short essays describing myth-illustrating paintings. Edition: *Imagines. Together with the writings of Younger Philostratus and Callistratus*. Trans. Arthus Fairbanks. London: William Heinemann (Loeb Classical Library 256). Similar collections were *The Greek Anthology* and *Anacroenta*. See Kingsley-Smith, "Mythology" (2010: 137)

[24] On the *cassoni*, see Carolina Campbell, *Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence: The Courtauld Wedding Chests* (2009).

[25] On English "applied emblematics", Daly, "The Emblem in Material Culture", in Daly (ed.) (2008: 411–457).

[26] See Gordon Kipling, *Enter the King: Theatre, Liturgy, and Ritual in the Medieval Civic Triumph* (1998), and Elizabeth Goldring et al. (eds.), *John Nichols's the Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I: A New Edition of the Early Modern Sources* (2014).

[27] See also Szönyi 1995; 2000a; 2003; 2006; 2008.

> the whole sensible world is like a kind of book written by the finger of God – that is, created by divine power – and each particular creature is somewhat like a figure, not invented by human decision, but instituted by the divine will to manifest the invisible things of God's wisdom.
>
> (Hugh of Saint Victor quoted by Cizewski 1987: 70)[28]

His contemporary, Guibert of Nogent (1055–1124) adopted Gregory the Great's notion and suggested a fourfold division of interpretation as the best way to read the Scriptures as well as the Book of Nature:

> [The] rules by which every page of scripture turns as if on so many wheels: history speaks of things done; allegory understands one thing by another; tropology is a moral way of speaking … and anagogue is the spiritual understanding by which one is led to things above.
>
> (Quoted by Cizewski 1987: 66)[29]

This fourfold division evolved into a complex and authoritative system of scriptural interpretation by St. Thomas of Aquinas, and Dante secularized it, boldly claiming that his own poem offered the same four senses of meaning. The idea of the *signatura rerum*, i.e., that the things of the world should be read as God's signs, was attractive not only in the Middle Ages but also in the Renaissance and the Baroque periods, and only eighteenth-century rationalism started undermining this conviction. One of the most grandiose explanations of the theory of *signatura rerum* can be found in Jacob Böhme's early modern treatise with the same title (a richly illustrated edition was published in Amsterdam, 1682).[30]

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[28] "Universus enim mundus iste sensibilis quasi liber est scripto digito Dei...", *Patrologia Latina* 176.814BC. The English tranlation is by Wanda Cizewski, who also offers a detailed analysis of the work. See Cizewski, *Reading the World as Scripture* (1987: 70).

[29] "Quo ordine sermo fieri debet", *Patrologia Latina* 156.25D.

[30] The cultural history of the *signatura rerum* from Paracelsus to Leibniz is discussed in Bianchi, *Signatura rerum* (1987). On Boehme's philosophy and iconography, Christoph Geissmar, *Das Auge Gottes. Bilder zu Jakob Böhme* (1993). Michel Foucault in his *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (1994 [1966]) gave a poststructuralist explanation. Vanderjagt & Berkel (eds.), *The Book of Nature in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (2005), follows the Book of Nature metaphor well into the nineteenth century.

Fig. 4. The Christian Philosopher. In George Hartgill, "Minister of the word". (1594). Title page, print, woodcut. Author/printer anon. British Museum. Location: BH/FF10/Portraits British CIV 2 P1. Associated Title: Astronomical tables. Acquisition date: 1863. Image available:
http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_det ails.aspx?objectId=3107761&partId=1 (accessed on 10 December 2018).

There is a telling English Renaissance picture showing the Christian Philosopher as he studies the Word of God and the Book of Nature in a balanced way (see Figure 4). This woodcut can be found on the title page of a book of astronomical tables compiled by George Hartgill, "Minister of the Word of God," printed in London, in 1594. The Philosopher holds the Bible (*Verbum Dei*) in one hand and in the other a model of the celestial spheres with a flag above: *Meditabor Verbum & Opera Jehovae* ("Consider the Words and the Works of God"). The Philosopher stands in a landscape featuring the sky and the earth, its plants and animals as well as human creations.

The Dedicatory Preface to this little work illustrates the mixed religious and scholarly style of the early scientific revolution, where the allusion to Romans 1:20 is unmistakable:

> To be short, if the Astronomer or Astrologian do saie, O come let us behold the heavens, the workes of God his fingers, the Moone & the Stars which he hath ordained, the rather, Forasmuch as that (as Saint Paul affirmeth), which may be knowen of God, is manifest in them, for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him, that is, His eternall power and Godhead, are seene by the creation of the world, being considered in his workes...
>
> (Hartgill 1594: 2)

In such emblematic expressions we find an ambition to unveil some higher truth, moral teaching or universal revelation, and these teachings were supposed to be conveyed by the help of tradition-bound cultural representations, the repositories of which were the Judeo-Christian as well as Greco-Roman mythologies. As Daniel Russell also emphasized: "The emblematic might view the world being constantly alert to paradigmatic analogies that recall and illuminate the moral and psychological wisdom of proverbial formulary of guidelines for the conduct of everyday life" (Russell 1988: 79).

As for early modern England, we can safely say that the natural – as well as exegetical – symbolism also penetrated every aspect of premodern life. The most important scenery was, without doubt, the church, where not only altarpieces and frescoes conveyed *sensus tropologicus*, but also the funeral monuments, ornaments, church flags, embroidered vestments of the priests, as well as the whole pageantry of the rituals and ceremonies. This symbolic Christian iconography prevailed in the secular sphere, too, and there it mingled with the classical gentile iconographic tradition (as mentioned above), among the decorations of city halls, the gables of houses, on tapestries hanging in castles or burgher residences, on the insignia of royal entries or guild organizations, on dresses and jewels, and even on pub-signs, carnival masks, or children's toys.

To illustrate the scholarship on the variety of emblematic cultural representations, Peter Daly has called attention to the great number of publications that explored the territory of "applied emblematics", or "extra-literary emblematics".[31] Just to mention a few that relate to English Renaissance culture, Michael Bath (2003) has written on painted ceilings of Scottish noble houses; it was also he who identified two of Thomas Combe's emblems on the wall paintings in a burgher house in Bury St. Edmund, Suffolk (Bath & Jones 1996).

It has also turned out that the twenty-eight carved oak panels decorating the Summer Room in University College, Oxford derive from the emblems of Alciato (Bayley 1958–1960: 192–201, 252–56, 341–46).

Roy Strong became aware of a wooden table at Hardwick Hall which was made for Bess of Hardwick, and an inscription on it explained the loyalty of the

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[31]   Daly, "The Emblem in Material Culture", in Daly (ed.) (2008: 411–457).

Cavendish family toward the queen through a motto and an emblematic use of two animals, a stag and an eglantine. As for jewellery, two famous examples from the collection of Elizabeth I show the popularity of emblematic thinking. These are the Pelican Jewel and the Phoenix Jewel. The first symbolizes the good ruler who imitates Christ in self-sacrifice for the subjects, while the mythical phoenix was an emblem of resurrection, perseverance, and uniqueness.[32] Emblematic motifs were prominent on coats of arms and armoury, but even ships could be decorated with emblems and imprese. Alan R. Young analysed Elizabeth I's warship the *White Bear* from 1599 and discovered twenty-seven impresa-like devices on it (Young 1988: 65–77). And these are only scattered examples taken from material culture to which one should add intangible emblematics, manifested in religious and social rituals.

All these spectacles had their reverberations in literature[33] which peaked in the very complex *Gesamtkunst*-expression of medieval and Renaissance theatre. The limits of this paper will not allow any extensive survey of this aspect but without at least some reference the account of English Renaissance image/word relationship would remain incomplete.

4. The emblematic theatre in the Renaissance

One has to emphasize now and again that in the premodern world life had a strong theatrical character and the theatre was often understood as an emblem for life. As Walter Raleigh allegorized in his short poem:

> What is our life? A play of passion.
> Our mirth the musicke of division,
> Our mothers wombes the tyring houses be,
> Where we are drest for this short Comedy.
> Heaven the Iudicious sharpe spectator is,
> That sits and markes still who doth act amisse,
> Our graves that hide us from the searching Sun
> Are like drawne curtaynes when the play is done,
>   Thus march we playing, to our latest rest,
>   Onely we dye in earnest, that's no jest.

(Raleigh 1612)[34]

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[32] Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth* (1999: 70, 73). Two famous portraits of the Queen, associated with the mentioned jewels are displayed on the website of the National Portrait Gallery with illuminating explanations: www.npg.org.uk/research/programmes/making-art-in-tudor-britain/the-phoenix-and-the-pelican-two-portraits-of-elizabeth-i-c.1575.php (accessed on 13 August 2015).

[33] See Heckscher, *Art and Literature* (1985 [1954]); Daly, "The Cultural Context of English Emblems" (1988); and Fowler, "The Emblem as a Literary Genre" (1999: 1–33).

[34] This is the version that appeared in 1612 in Orlando Gibbons's *First Set of Madrigals and*

Perhaps it is Glynne Wickham who has done most to make us understand the nature of representation on the Elizabethan stage. In his multi-volume synthesis – *Early English Stages*, published in the 1960s – he worked out the concept of the emblematic theatre. The novelty of his approach was that, as if sharing the still-to-come post-structuralist aversion to "grand narratives", he rejected the evolutionist interpretation of English theatre-history that tried to create a linear and unbroken story of development from James Burbage's simple public theatre to the complex, multimedial, scenery- and machinery-aided playhouses. As he wrote,

> This concept of progress and direct progression from the Elizabethan theatre into Restoration theatre via the Court Masks is one which I feel obliged to challenge in the sharpest way. … Instead, I wish to argue that what we are really confronted with is a conflict between an emblematic theatre – literally, a theatre which aimed at achieving dramatic illusion by figurative representation, and a theatre of realistic illusion – literally, a theatre seeking to simulate actuality in terms of images. The former kind of theatre grew up spontaneously during the Middle Ages and reached its climax in the style of public building depicted by De Witt in his sketch of the Swan.
>
> (Wickham 1966: 155)

The new type of theatre (especially after the Restoration) voyeuristically imitated fashionable conversations and used images as painted perspectivist backdrops.

The emblematic way of seeing appeared on different levels in the Renaissance theatre.[35] Shakespeare and his contemporaries used emblematic words, characters, stage properties, and tableaux-like scenes, but most importantly the whole enterprise could be considered – at least in certain cases – an extended emblem, the title of the play being the *motto*, the spectacle the *pictura*, and the dramatic text the *scriptura* (Daly 1998: 181–186). Most important among these emblematic elements was the word emblem, being a complex figure or trope which evokes or describes an emblematic *pictura* and in the given context uses it metaphorically or allegorically. Eventually the word emblem can contain an explanation, too, just as the *scriptura* does so in the emblem. In Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, for example, Portia describes the nature of mercy with the following ornate speech:

Motets. However, more than forty variations of this poem survive in prints and manuscripts of the seventeenth century. Michael Rudick established a somewhat different and only eight-line long version to be Raleigh's original. See "The Text of Ralegh's Lyric, 'What Is Our Life'" (1986). I stick to Gibbons's version for being the most widely known in the early modern period, and also because of my personal preference.

[35]   Here I follow the insightful typological classification of Daly, "Shakespeare and the Emblem" (1984) and "The Cultural Context of English Emblems" (1988: 153–87).

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown.
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptred sway,
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice.

(*The Merchant of Venice*, 4.1.184–95)

This soliloquy in fact unites the ekphrastic description of an emblem picture with its *subscriptio*-like comment. However, one need not suppose that behind it there is a real emblem picture.

Since Seneca's *De clementia*, a collection of advice addressed to the young Nero, much has been written about the act of clemency and this gesture has also been visualized in emblematic forms, such as the ones in Cesare Ripa"s famous Renaissance iconography (which was also known and popular among English writers from the end of the sixteenth century).[36] The *Iconologia* first gives a definition: "Mercy means the moderation of severity, that is, moderation in passing deserved judgement to evildoers. So it represents the most perfect degree of justice, and it is a necessary quality for those who rule on others".[37] Then, in his usual manner Ripa mentions pictorial examples mostly from Antiquity, and then suggests various iconographical representations of Mercy: a

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[36] His groundbreaking work, *Iconologia, or Hieroglyphical figures of Cesare Ripa, Knight of Perugia* was first published in 1593 and was conceived as a guide to the symbolism of emblem books and emblematic representations. The first illustrated version was published in 1603, followed by seven more Italian editions till the late 18th century. There were also eight non-Italian translations during this period: 1644 French, 1644 Dutch, 1699 Dutch, 1704 German, 1709 English, 1760 German, 1766 French and 1779 English. Although the English editions were rather late, there is known a seventeenth-century English translation which remained in manuscript (London, British Library, MS Additional 23195). See Cesare Ripa, *Introduction to the Iconologia or Hieroglyphical figures of Cesare Ripa, Knight of Perugia*. Online: https://www.levity.com/alchemy/iconol_i.html (accessed 24 October 2014). This is a partial transcription of London, British Library, MS Additional 23195, a seventeenth-century translation of the Italian.

[37] "La Clemenza non è altro, che un' astinenza da correggere I rei col debito castigo, & essendo un temperamento della servitú, viene à comporre una perfetta maniera di Giustitia, & à quelli che governano, è molto necessaria", Ripa, *Iconologia overo descrittione di diverse imagini…* (Ripa 1603 : 69).

woman who holds an olive branch and leans to an olive tree from which the *fasces* of the Roman consuls hang. Another visualisation may be a lion, which is known for its clemency in refraining from killing humans who have not harmed it. Yet another image may be "a woman, holding a judgment of conviction in her left hand while with her right hand she crosses it out with a pen. At her feet there should be some books".[38] Shakespeare may have been aware of some of these representations; however, he ingeniously invented a new image – the gentle shower dripping on monarchs and changing them into better people – and presented it with explanation as if it could be taken from an emblem book. There are also other, well-known cases, when Shakespeare in fact recalled actual emblems verbally.[39]

Elizabethan dramatists, most notably Shakespeare, often used emblematic characters. The stylized figure of Vice or Dissimulation is well-known from the morality plays but it also turned up on the Renaissance stage. Many scholars have interpreted Richard III or Iago as his embodiment; however, Shakespeare also managed to beef up these morality characters into life-like protagonists. Still, Richard characterizes himself as an emblematic *caveat*: "Thus, like the formal Vice, Iniquity, / I moralize two meanings in one word" (*Richard III*, 3.1. 6).

The Elizabethan stage was rather puritanical, without much scenery. On the other hand, symbolic stage properties played an important role in the visual impact of the performance. A lot of emblematic objects – crowns, daggers, skulls – created figurative ambiguities (as Peter Daly reminds, *in bonam partem* and *in malam partem*);[40] they were often verbally described, but the sight certainly added to the effect. The daggers of Shylock, Macbeth, or Othello were so powerful because on the one hand they naturalistically signified the fearful weapon that most contemporary audiences knew well from real-life experience, at the same time the property-dagger also conjured up an emblematic personification, something like "Tragedy" in Ripa's description:

> [Tragedy] Is a dramatic representation of serious events, and characterized by the figure of a majestick woman, dressed in mourning, holding a dagger in her hand, which are expressive of the greatness, pain and terror of this subject; the murdered child at her feet, alludes to cruel and violent death, being the theme of tragedy.
>
> (Ripa 1779: 62)

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38   "Donna che con la sinistra mano tenga un processo, & con la destra lo cassi con una penna, & sotto à i piedi vi saranno alcuni libri," Ripa, *Iconologia* (1603 : 70).

39   See the voluminous literature, including John Doebler, *Shakespeare's Speaking Pictures* (1974); Douglas Peterson, *Time, Tide and Tempest* (1973), and Heckscher, *Art and Literature* (1985 [1954]). A good summary is Daly, *Shakespeare and the Emblem* (1984).

40   Daly (1984: 159).

Emblems of cruelty and horror could also be used subversively. The skull in Hamlet's hand functioned as a *memento mori*, eventually calling in mind Whitney's Emblem 229, *Ex maximo minimum*:

> Where lively once, Gods image was expreste,
> Wherein, sometime was sacred reason plac'de,
> The head, I meane, that is so richly bleste,
> With sighte, with smell, with hearinge, and with taste.
> Lo, nowe a skull, both rotten bare, and drye...

<div align="right">(Whitney 1586: Emb. 229)</div>

However in other plays these emblematic elements turn into a grotesque counterpoint to the whole emblematic tradition, think of Vindice's preparation in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, the swallowed tongue of Hieronimo, the mutilated hands of Lavinia, or the plucked out eyes of Gloucester.[41]

As mentioned, a great number of studies have been devoted to the emblematic interpretation of Shakespeare's plays. My own perception is that the dramatist very often used traditional symbolization; after all, his poetical vernacular was the emblematic way of seeing and thinking. At the same time, he lived in a transitory age when whole systems of traditional values were questioned and overturned, so on occasion he could ironically or sarcastically approach the very same traditions (see Szönyi 2000b: 30–33). A good example of this ambiguity is the way he treated Petrarchism in *As You Like It*, or in *Sonnet* 130. The latter is also a good example to illustrate how the "scanning technique" is necessary when one reads a Renaissance sonnet, similarly to the demand of perceiving emblematic pictures. As we all remember:

> MY mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun
> Coral is far more red than her lips' red:
> If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
> If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
> I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,
> But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
> And in some perfumes is there more delight
> Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks. …

<div align="right">(*Sonnet* 130)</div>

The poet's description moves systematically forward like a copy machine's light-bar scans the page, section by section.

One cannot help detecting a vacillating ambiguity in how Shakespeare used tradition-based representations throughout his career. In his last plays the

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41 On Vindice's skull in relation to the semiotics of the early modern subject see Kiss, *Contrasting the Early Modern and the Postmodern Semiotics of Telling Stories* (2011: 70).

emblematic mode definitely prevailed to that extent that the romances, especially *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale*, challenge the modern audience. All three of them have very complicated, long, and incredible plots, which brutally deny what Aristotle may have imagined about the representation of human nature – and what Sidney advertised in the *Defense* – at least from the viewpoint of psychological motivation. While from this angle the romances are unapproachable, they become more acceptable as rituals – in a way as substitutes for religion – whose natural representational logic is the emblematic and the symbolic.[42]

These days it has become (again) very fashionable to research Shakespeare's attitude about religion. I think he was much less concerned about dogmatic questions or denominational issues than most of his contemporaries. On the other hand, I do feel in his lines a kind of pantheistical openness which embraces the transcendental as well as the natural. For him, a major engine to achieve a synthesis between these two spheres was imagination. And he privileged with its possession not only the inspired poets but also invited the audience to take part in it:

> O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
> The brightest heaven of invention,
> A kingdom for a stage, princes to act
> And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!
> … But pardon, and gentles all,
> The flat unraised spirits that have dared
> On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
> So great an object: …
> And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,
> On your imaginary forces work.
> ….
> Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts;
> Admit me Chorus to this history;
> Who prologue-like your humble patience pray,
> Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play.
>
> (*King Henry V*, Prologue, 1–34)

This plea for the imagination leads us back to what I think the three archetypal pragmatic functions of verbal and pictorial images. 1/ They can conjure up revelatory visions and thus, as if magically, to show something that is otherwise

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[42]   There is no room here to expand on this topic, see, among others, the imaginative emblematic interpretations of Doebler (1974); Heilmann (1948); Mehl (1969); Peterson (1973); Muñoz Simmonds, *Myth, Emblem, and Music in Cymbeline* (1992); Steadman, "Dalila, the Ulysses Myth, and the Renaissance Allegorical Tradition" (1962); and Steadman, "Falstaff as Actaeon: A Dramatic Emblem" (1963).

not perceivable (epiphany); or, 2/ call something back in mind that is not presently available because of physical or temporal distance (imitation); or 3/ create something that simply pleases through the recognition of rhythm or some other quality (the aesthetical function). These three functions seem to have prevailed since prehistoric times and the protagonists of my paper – philosophers and poets, Plato, Aristotle, Philip Sidney, and Shakespeare – were aware of them and reflected on them in their theoretical and artistic-literary works. In our postmodern age we emphasize even more that neither "conjuring up" nor "calling to mind" can happen without the participation of the interpretive community, because art, or any other cultural representation, does not exist by itself but *happens* in the space between the work and the audience. No doubt, the English Renaissance poets offered their speaking pictures to facilitate the creation of this interpretive space.

5. Epilogue

A few years ago, I highlighted in one of my papers a paradox (see Szőnyi 2003). On the one hand I claimed that the emblematic way of seeing could be considered as a forerunner of our multimedial age. A few paragraphs later I "interred" iconology, registering that by the twentieth century emblematic structures and their representational logic had become largely obsolete. In the end I asked: what should we do with this cultural heritage? Is there any point in propagating, explaining, teaching it while people understand it less and less and become bored by the once witty and learned mythological allusions and moral teachings?

I received two enlightening responses to my – mainly rhetorical – questions by two outstanding emblem researchers, Michael Bath and David Graham.[43] They helped me to navigate between the Scylla of scholarly enthusiasm and the Charybdis of cultural pessimism, or in other words, between self-confident traditional scholarship and post-structuralist relativism. Both of them alluded to Peter Daly's studies about the "*Nachleben* of the emblem" which mostly manifests itself in modern advertisements, logos, and propaganda.[44]

Honestly, very few people open an emblem book today for the purpose of bedtime reading. And even those who venture into reading Sidney, Spenser, or Shakespeare, miss out on most of their speaking pictures. Theatre directors usually cut those figurative allusions from actual performances. What is it then that we do when we, scholars of literature and cultural history, try to decipher

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[43]   I warmly encourage my reader to look into these insightful reflections: http://ecolloquia.btk.ppke.hu/index.php/2003/reflections (accessed on 14 August 2015).

[44]   Peter M. Daly, "The *Nachleben* of the Emblem in Some Modern Logos, Advertisements, and Propaganda", in Daly (ed.) (2008: 489–519).

and contextualize those speaking pictures? On the one hand, it is a kind of "cultural heritage studies" to preserve or recover the products of human imagination from past ages. But at the same time, since literature continues to be symbolic and the techniques of figuration and ambiguation do not fundamentally change, we also get closer to understanding the lasting mechanisms of representation.

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