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**Preface, Prescription, and Principle: The Early Development  
of Vernacular Emblem Proto-theory in France\***

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**Resumen**

Los primeros tratados franceses sobre Emblemática aparecieron en el siglo XVII, pero antes de su aparición muchos autores de textos emblemáticos y traducciones vernáculas habían ofrecido apreciaciones en sus paratextos (principalmente en los prólogos y dedicatorias) sobre su concepción del emblema. Como un género que emergió rápidamente, el emblema sufrió una serie de transformaciones en sí mismo, y fue imposible desarrollar una auténtica teoría del emblema no solo por eso, sino también por las presiones comerciales asociadas al intento de aprovecharse del nuevo mercado para libros ilustrados de todo tipo. Este ensayo examina el progreso de las reflexiones sobre el emblema en Francia desde los primeros tiempos hasta el período inmediatamente anterior a la publicación del *Art des emblemes* de Claude-François Ménéstrier en 1662 y explora algunas de las razones por las que el nacimiento de la teoría del emblema en francés fue demorada tanto tiempo.

**Palabras clave**

Emblema, teoría, prólogo, paratexto, Alciato, bimedialidad, perspectivismo

**Title**

Prólogos, recomendaciones y principios: el primer desarrollo de la proto-teoría del emblema vernáculo en Francia

**Abstract**

The first French-language treatises on emblems appeared in the seventeenth century, but prior to their appearance, many authors of emblem texts and vernacular translations offered glimpses in their paratextual material –prefaces and dedicatory letters, for the most part– of their concept of the emblem. As a rapidly emerging

genre, the emblem itself underwent a series of transformations, and an attempt at developing a true theory of the emblem was rendered impossible not only by those but by the commercial pressures associated with attempting to take advantage of the new market for illustrated books of all kinds. This essay examines the progress of thinking about the emblem in France from the earliest times to the period immediately prior to the publication of Claude-François Ménéstrier's *Art des emblemes* in 1662, and explores some of the reasons why the birth of emblem theory in French was so long delayed.

### Keywords

Emblem, theory, preface, paratext, Alciato, bimodality, prescriptivism



... sacrae quercus firmis radicibus adstant.  
Sicca licent venti concutiant folia.  
(Alciato, "Firmissima convelli non posse")

## INTRODUCTION

The history of emblem studies, and thus of what it has become customary to call "emblem theory," is deeply intertwined with and inseparable from the history of the emblem itself. From the earliest days of the emblem, beginning with Alciato's famous preface to his friend Conrad Peutinger, creators of emblems interrogated their own work in their paratexts, teasing out its roots, its characteristics, and its implications. The emblem-as-form thus evolved in tandem with the emblem-as-object, simultaneously a bimodal creation and an object of study, on the one hand a work to be consumed, enjoyed, and internalized, on the other a phenomenon to be studied, explained, and marketed. The early history of emblem theory is largely concerned with interpreting the usually fragmentary and frequently enigmatic hints dropped by authors of emblem texts in the prefaces to the emblem books that contain those texts; only in the seventeenth century does the study of emblems begin to take shape in anything like a systematic way. This essay will explore a few corners of the landscape traversed by that strand of thinking, retracing the stages in the evolution of the emblem as an object of thought and analysis from Alciato's preface to the development of the earliest emblem theory in the seventeenth century, endeavouring thereby to synthesize some fragments of how we have thought about emblems in the past, and to shed some light on how we think about them now.

The history of emblem studies may conveniently be divided into four phases, of which the first is a pre-modern phase characterized by frequently contradictory and sometimes rather offhand remarks scattered in an incidental way throughout the corpus of emblem literature itself. In this phase, because there is as yet no coherent “emblem theory” but only what might be called at best “proto-theory,” and thus no theoretical treatises *per se*, we are obliged to assemble a theoretical understanding from the views of the authors of emblem texts, including Alciato himself, as reflected for the most part in their prefaces and other paratextual documentation. The second phase is associated with the appearance of the first treatises on the emblem, which ally themselves explicitly to the enormous earlier body of work on the *impresa*, the personal device, and so forth. The fullest embodiment of this phase is almost certainly represented by the extraordinarily voluminous and transitional theoretical corpus of the seventeenth-century Jesuit compiler Claude-François Menestrier, though his contemporaries also have much to say. This phase, largely dormant throughout the eighteenth century, resurfaces and culminates in the writings of the antiquarian Henry Green and his contemporaries at the end of the nineteenth century. That final portion of that phase, and the last two phases in their entirety, fall beyond the scope of this essay.<sup>1</sup>

#### FOUNDATIONS: ALCIATO’S “LITTLE BOOK OF EMBLEMS”

The emblem is unlike most forms<sup>2</sup> in that there is general agreement among scholars about its exact *terminus a quo*, namely, the unauthorized publication in 1531, by the Augsburg printer Heinrich Steyner, of a small book containing 104 epigrams composed by the jurist Andrea Alciato, originally from Milan but then residing in the French town of Bourges.<sup>3</sup>

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\* This essay builds on and expands conclusions reached in previously published and unpublished recent work, including Graham 2016a, 2016b, and 2016c.

<sup>1</sup> The first of these final two phases, modern “scientific” emblem scholarship, is truly a twentieth-century phenomenon. It builds gradually through the first half of the century in a substantial body of German and English scholarly literature but really flowers only the latter decades of the century, when it results in the creation of scholarly journals and societies devoted wholly or primarily to the study of the emblem. A fourth phase beginning in the final decade of the last century and extending into this one has seen the systematic application of electronic technologies and the popularization of the emblem, which is now an integral part of the mainstream of scholarship about early modern European culture.

<sup>2</sup> If indeed it is a form: see below, 9–10.

<sup>3</sup> Bernhard Scholz’s framing of the event is typical, and largely uncontested: “The publication in Augsburg in 1531 of Andreas Alciatus’s *Emblematum liber* marks the beginnings of emblematics as it was to flourish for the following two-and-a-half centuries in nearly all European literatures.” (Scholz 1986, 213)

These epigrams had apparently been in circulation in manuscript form among Alciato's friends and acquaintances for several years by the time they came into Steyner's possession; Alciato himself, in a famous letter to his friend Francesco Calvi dated 9 December 1522,<sup>4</sup> recounts the composition of a small book of epigrams to which he has given the title "emblemata," and describes how each epigram "elegantly signifies" something either from history or from natural phenomena.<sup>5</sup> In the dedicatory preface of the collection later published by Steyner (fig. 1), Alciato expanded somewhat on this concept, likening his textual "emblems" to the humanist's equivalent of traditional metal badges signifying guild affiliation: "Vestibus ut torulos, petasis ut figere parmas, / Et valeat tacitis scribere quisque notis" (Just as one affixes trimmings to clothes and badges to hats, so it behooves every one of us to write in silent marks; trans. Barker, et al. 1995). We are therefore fortunate to have some direct indication of just what the *pater emblematum* was thinking when he applied the term "emblem" to his epigrams: unfortunately, however, his references have generated a good deal of controversy and little by way of consensus.

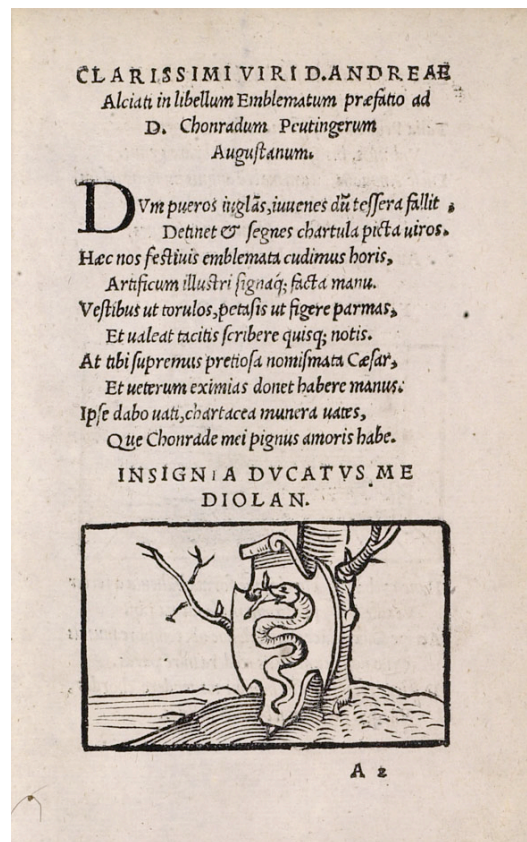
Alciato's letter and preface have given rise to an extraordinary amount of scholarship; this is unsurprising, because it seems clear in retrospect that Alciato himself, though he had devoted considerable thought to the status and function of his "emblems" as an early modern humanist artefact –this is apparent from the analogy in the preface– had not in the first instance conceived of them as being anything other than texts. As Hessel Miedema writes in his early ground-breaking article on Alciato's use of the term "emblem", "An emblem, then, is, as Alciati understands it, a special kind of epigram" (Miedema 1968, 238). It seems to have been Steyner, the printer-publisher, not Alciato, the author, who first thought of combining the descriptive epigrams with woodcuts to create a new kind of bimedial composite: he claims as much in a note to the reader that precedes the first emblem (Alciato 1531, fol. A1v –fig. 2–). In the note, Steyner both begs the reader's indulgence for the relatively crude nature of the figures –which may well have already been in his possession at the time Alciato's epigrams came into his hands– and hints at their being a kind of "visual crutch" for the less learned reader, since the truly learned will have no trouble divining the intended meaning of each epigram without the need for any such assistance.

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<sup>4</sup> Bernhard Scholz gives 2 December 1522 (Scholz 1986, 215), but this seems to be a slip; the Memorial Alciato web site has 9 January 1523 (Barker, et al. 1995)., but Bill Barker (p.c.) has confirmed to me that this date is erroneous and that 9 December 1522 is indeed correct.

<sup>5</sup> "[L]ibellum composui epigrammaton, cui titulum feci Emblemata: singulis enim epigrammatibus aliquid describo, quod ex historia, vel ex rebus naturalibus aliquid elegans significet."

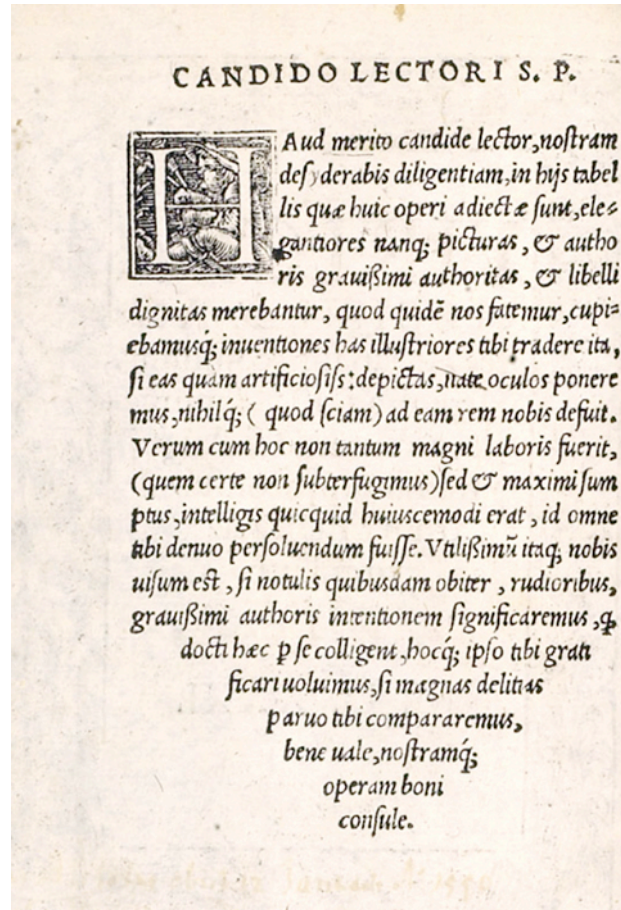
Miedema, after quoting this note in its entirety, therefore suggests that “The plates, then, were added to the emblemata by Steyner as a guide for the less educated reader” (Miedema, 243). Miedema’s contention that the emblem was for Alciato merely a text seems persuasive, but as Scholz provocatively and rightly asks, “if Alciato’s use of the term *emblema* is as clear-cut as Miedema asserts, how do we explain the fact that his followers departed from his usage, although, in accordance with the poetics of *imitatio*, they continually cite the *Emblematum liber* as their model?” (Scholz 1986, 214).<sup>6</sup>



1. Alciato, *Emblematum liber*, Augsburg, 1531 (*princeps*)

Figures 1-4 from Glasgow University Emblem Projects <<http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk>>

<sup>6</sup> See also Elisabeth Klecker’s subtle and learned reading of Alciato’s various letters on the subject of his emblems, on the Steyner and Wechel printers’ prefaces, and on the status of the images in their editions and the appropriateness of the images to the epigrams; in particular, she suggests that Miedema may be exaggerating the perceived “unlearned” inferiority of the visual image (Klecker, 2007).



2. Alciato, *Emblematum liber*, Augsburg, 1531 (*princeps*)

One tack taken by emblem scholars in addressing this fundamental question is to claim in effect that Alciato's letter to Calvi and his preface to Peutinger should not be taken as authoritative theoretical statements. Peter M. Daly, for example, heavily discounts Alciato's remarks: "Important though the letter is, it is still only a letter and not a treatise. One conclusion is, however, inescapable. Alciato's authorial remarks cannot be regarded as an accurate account of the author's process of composition" (Daly 1998, 12). Another, perhaps simpler, approach is simply to note Alciato's reaction to the sudden and no doubt entirely unexpected commercial success of Steyner's unauthorized publication:<sup>7</sup> he commissioned the Paris printer and

<sup>7</sup> Steyner issued three editions of the *emblemata*: two in 1531 (28 February and 6 April), and a third in 1534.

publisher Chrétien Wechel to produce, in 1534, a lavishly illustrated edition of his epigrams. Given Alciato's own immediate adoption of the bimedral "Steyner model," and thus his tacit endorsement of it, though it seems probable he had little interest in and little to do with the visual images used by Wechel and subsequent publishers, then, it was hardly surprising that his multitude of imitators should do likewise.

From the moment of its fortuitous transition from a manuscript of epigrams to a printed publication combining images commissioned and chosen not by the author but by his friend and dedicatee Conrad Peutinger and by the printer Heinrich Steyner, then, the emblem was both bimedral and variously defined, with its visual component –essential to its commercial success though it was, and perhaps in part because of that disconcerting fact–being generally viewed in theoretical statements as inherently inferior in status to the text. From the outset, the emblem was thus the work of a committee,<sup>8</sup> whose members were the author (or authors, in the case where commentaries were subsequently added) of the texts, the artist and engraver, the printer, publisher, and bookseller. Given Alciato's own lack of regard for the images, one may well ask, as does Elisabeth Klecker, whether his *Emblemata* are in fact emblems at all!<sup>9</sup>

#### ALCIATO'S EARLY FRENCH IMITATORS AND THEIR PREFACES

The story of how the emblem came to be understood as a bimedral genre is a fascinating and complex one, and it is intimately bound up with the composition and publishing history of the first vernacular emblem books in France. It is first of all quite striking to note that in contrast to Alciato's own "little book of emblems", which had appeared in French translation as early as 1536 under the title *Livret des emblemes*, few titles of early French vernacular emblem books make any mention of the emblem per se. Among vernacular titles published prior to 1560, only Guillaume Guérout's *Le Premier livre des emblemes* (1550) provides an exception to this general rule. Other titles include *Hecatographie* (Gilles Corrozet, 1540), *Le Theatre des bons engins* (Guillaume de La Perrière, 1540), *Imagination*

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<sup>8</sup> Alison Adams reminds us of Daniel Russell's *boutade* to this effect in the opening lines of her essay on sixteenth-century emblematic composition in France (Adams 2007, 10). For a full illustration of how this worked in practice, see also Judi Loach's account of the publication of Ménestrier's first *Art des emblemes* in 1662 (Loach 2007).

<sup>9</sup> "De façon provocante, on pourrait formuler la question suivante: les *Emblemata* d'Alciat sont-ils des emblèmes?" (Klecker 2007). The answer to this question is that quite clearly, they are not, if we define the emblem by what it very quickly became rather than by what Alciato originally intended; the entirely unsatisfactory alternative is to invalidate almost all later emblematic production because it differs from that founding intention.

*poetique* (Barthélemy Aneau, 1552), and *Le Pegme* (Pierre Coustau, 1555 ; French translation by Lanteaume de Romieu): the final two are vernacular translations of Latin originals.<sup>10</sup> Beginning in the 1560s, however, the use of the word “*emblem*” in the title becomes increasingly common. Georgette de Montenay’s *Emblemes ou devises chrestiennes* (1567), Adrien Le Jeune’s *Emblemes* (1567; vernacular translation of his *Emblemata* of 1565), and Jean-Jacques Boissard’s *Emblemes latins avec l’interpretation françoise* (1588) all make explicit their emblematic content, and in the seventeenth century, it would be normal for French emblem books to state themselves as such.

Given the use of the term “*emblème*” by Alciato in the vernacular French editions of his work, one may wonder why French authors and publishers shied away from imitating him, particularly because his name is so frequently cited in their work and because it is so clear that they are deliberately emulating him. The answer to this question may lie in what exactly the authors and publishers particularly wished to imitate, namely, the commercial success of a new kind of illustrated book. Steyner issued two editions of Alciato in quick succession in 1531 (28 February and 6 April), and a third followed in 1534, the year in which the first “authorized” edition appeared in Paris. That edition was itself closely followed in 1536 by the first vernacular translation of Alciato into French, by Jean Lefebvre; other editions, some bilingual, others in Latin and in several vernacular languages: these appeared in 1539 (Paris; Latin/French), 1542 (Paris; Latin/German), 1546 (Venice; Latin), 1547 (Lyons; Latin), 1548 (Lyons; Latin) 1549 (two editions in Lyons; one Spanish, the other French), 1550 and 1551 (Lyons; Latin); 1551 (Lyons; Italian).<sup>11</sup> In light of such an explosive proliferation of editions in the years following the first appearance of the work, it is not surprising to read statements such as that of Margitta Rouse, who writes, referring to Michael Bath’s suggestion that more than two thousand emblem books were published in Europe by the end of the seventeenth century (Bath 2006, 275), that “Alciato’s book was hugely successful and prompted a veritable emblem craze.” (Rouse 2015). A craze, indeed, and as with all crazes, a huge commercial success. The increased tendency to include “*emblem*” specifically in the title of emblem books after approximately 1565

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<sup>10</sup> Claude Paradin’s *Devises heroiques* (1551) does not figure in this list because it is a collection of personal devices, not an emblem book, though the second edition (1557) adds commentaries that make it resemble one from the point of view of its page layout. I will have more to say about the potential reasons for this below.

<sup>11</sup> See the Glasgow web site for a list of early editions of Alciato, both those included among the digitized editions housed there (<http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/alciato/>) and others listed in Denis Drysdall’s index of first appearances of individual emblems (<http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/alciatoeditions.html>).



may well speak to the increasing dominance of Alciato's *emblemata* and the growing and more explicitly acknowledged consensus that his work had provided a canonical model to be imitated.

In other words, it seems plausible to suppose that the intention of the earliest author-publisher teams was not, at least initially, to draw inspiration from Alciato's rather quaint parallel between guild badges and enigmatic epigrams composed in classical tongues. Instead, they were almost certainly seeking first and foremost to capitalize on the commercial success enjoyed by this new genre. Additional support for this hypothesis can, I think, be derived from the fact that several of the early author-publisher teams responsible for vernacular emblem books published in France also produced illustrated books in closely allied but nonetheless genres distinct from the emblem. In addition to his *Hecatongraphie* and a number of volumes unrelated to the emblem genre, Gilles Corrozet produced three closely allied volumes of "blasons domestiques" (1539), Aesopic fables (1542), and *Le Tableau de Cebes de Thebes*, which includes a section in which a number of emblems appear (Corrozet 1543, Corrozet 1542, Corrozet 1539). Guillaume de La Perrière, author of *Le Theatre des bons engins*, also produced *La Morosophie* (1553) and *Les Cent considerations d'amour*, which first appeared unillustrated in 1548 but in a subsequent illustrated edition produced in 1577 (La Perrière 1577, La Perrière 1553, La Perrière 1548). As for Barthélemy Aneau and Guillaume Guérout, their volumes of illustrated popular natural history—which led to a secondary craze for such literature that would last into the seventeenth century—have been characterized as emblem books by Alison Saunders, though my own analysis of them suggests a different conclusion (Aneau 1552b, Aneau 1549, Guérout 1550b).<sup>12</sup> Other examples abound of similar collaborations that are clearly distinct from emblems, such as Guérout's *Figures de la Bible, illustrées d'huictains francoys* (Guérout 1564).

An additional, though perhaps counter-intuitive, aspect of this phenomenon is the sudden appearance of the "naked emblem" as seen, for example, in the unillustrated pirate editions of La Perrière, Corrozet, and Alciato printed by Denis de Harsy. Despite the tendency of some scholars to see in these works a variant form of the emblem, and despite the fact that by printing unillustrated editions, Harsy was in fact returning to something close to Alciato's original conception of the emblem as an epigram, Stephen Rawles has concluded on the basis of a full assessment of these editions that Harsy's motive was that "[t]he commercial inducement to produce books in Lyons for the Lyons market was considerable" (Rawles 1993, 213). As Rawles goes on to write, seeing that the residents of Lyons were keen to buy

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<sup>12</sup> See Saunders 1976 and Graham 2011.

emblem books, “Harsy spotted a market, and filled a gap, just before Jacques Moderne, Jean de Tournes, Rouillé/Bonhomme and Constantin/Sabon stepped in with superior products” (Rawles 1993, 214). Harsy’s inferior unillustrated editions were thus able to be rushed into production to capitalize on the rapidly expanding market for anything resembling an emblem book, a market in which any book marketed as an emblem book could take advantage of the fact that the very conception of the emblem itself was not yet fully formed.

In other words, then, what we now see as a craze for emblems and emblem books may in reality have been an insatiable appetite for illustrated books of all kinds, as well as for any book that could claim to be an emblem book or to resemble the first emblem books, a commercial reality that in the best traditions of self-reinforcing phenomena, in turn drove authors and publishers to produce an ever wider variety of such material.<sup>13</sup> This production was thus very likely aimed primarily at meeting the demand for illustrated books, with relatively little attention paid in the early years following the first editions of Alciato’s emblems to what we might think of now as “emblematic specificity”, that is to say, very little by way of analysis, synthesis, or indeed theory as we think of it today. Additional confirmation for this view is to be found in the early prefaces, which reveal a startling lack of consensus about exactly what the authors and printers/publishers thought they were doing. Elsewhere, I have discussed this phenomenon with particular attention to the first and second versions of Guillaume de La Perrière’s preface to his *Theatre des bons engins*, which suggest entirely contradictory views about the roles to be played by image and text in the creation of meaning from his emblems (Graham 2005b). Similar considerations apply, however, in the case of other early authors.

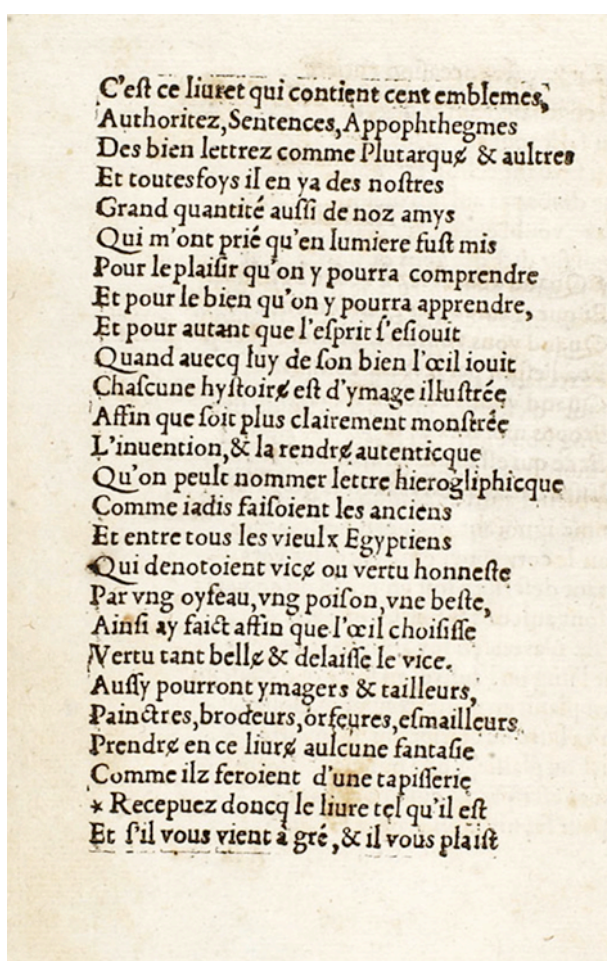
Gilles Corrozet’s liminary poem in the *Hecatographie* strongly suggests that for Corrozet, as for Alciato, the emblem was primarily a textual genre. In a suggestive passage, he seems to equate the emblem with a number of other didactic forms, writing of his book as “ce livret qui contient cent emblemes, / Autoritez, Sentences, Appophthegmes” (Corrozet 1540, A3v –fig. 3–). Corrozet’s multiplication of what he appears to see as near-synonyms for the emblem suggests a degree of uncertainty about the specificity of what he had been contracted to produce. A few lines later, Corrozet describes the role of the images as being primarily to provide

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<sup>13</sup> Paradoxically, the result of this positive feedback loop would be to blur the initial understanding of the emblem and to erase many of the boundaries separating many of the bimodal genres, thereby leading to the welter of forms and taxonomies that so confounded the attempts of thinkers in the seventeenth century to distinguish clearly among them.

pleasure, whereas it is the emblem text that delivers the all-important moral lesson:

. . . pour autant que l'esprit s'esjouit  
 Quand avecq luy de son bien l'oeil jouit  
 Chascune hystoire est d'ymage illustrée  
 Affin que soit plus clairement monstrée  
 L'invention, & la rendre autenticque  
 Qu'on peult nommer lettre hieroglyphicque  
 Comme jadis faisoient les anciens  
 Et entre tous les vieulx Egyptiens . . . (Ibid.)



3. Gilles Corrozet, *Hecatographie*, Paris, Denis Janot, 1540

The link to hieroglyphics, in Corrozet as elsewhere in the emblem corpus, reveals the extent to which the earliest emblem authors were aware that the emblem was a deliberately enigmatic genre. Corrozet's position thus seems to echo that of Steyner as characterized by Miedema, in viewing the figures as a crutch ("affin que soit plus clairement monstrée / L'invention"); though his insistence on the pleasurable qualities afforded by the image is new, it will continue to resonate to the time of Ménestrier, who was unequivocal in his view that the woodcuts or engravings provided an essential visual attractor for the reader. In affirming the emblem's relationship to the hieroglyph, Corrozet and other writers also sought to reinforce its authority: the mysterious and hieratic Egyptian inscriptions clearly had power. Nonetheless, Corrozet's focus on primacy of the text is unmistakable, and although he does dwell on the images as a potential source of inspiration for visual artisans (tailors, painters, embroiderers, jewellers, and enamel workers are all mentioned), he concludes his preface with an eight-line stanza in which reading is the sole focus of his attention, and the only way to derive from the emblems the moral profit that they can provide:

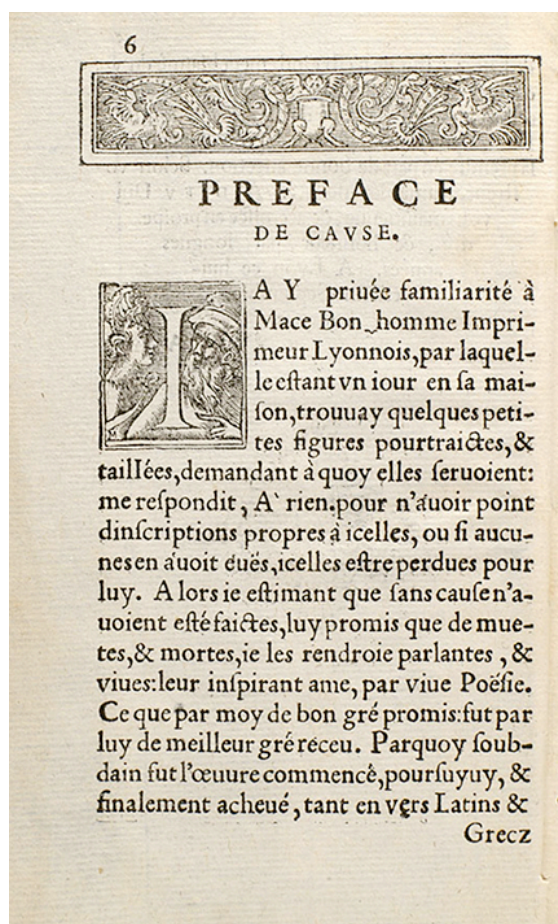
Quand vous voudrez prendre quelque plaisir  
 Et à l'esprit par lecture complaire,  
 Quand vous voudrez scavoit quelque exemplaire  
 Propos moraux de la philosophie  
 Et ce qui est maintesfoys necessaire  
 Lisez dedans cest Hecatographie. (Corrozet 1540, A4r)

Guillaume Guérout's dedicatory poem to the Comte de Gruyère in his *Premier livre des emblemes* seems to take up where Corrozet leaves off; having engaged in the usual self-deprecatory rhetoric about the puny nature of the gift that he, a person of no consequence, can bestow, he writes that nonetheless, his emblem book

. . . ha bien puissance  
 De vous donner quelque resjouissance  
 Quand vostre esprit de tout soucy delivre:  
 Lire voudra quelque embleme en ce livre. (Guérout 1550a, 5)

Guérout's perfunctory nod to the emblem seems merely to be a reinforcement of the word's inclusion in the title of his book, and as many commentators have emphasized, his emblems, more than those of any other author, lie at the margins of the genre. More narrative, more structurally and typographically heterogeneous (some, indeed, have no accompanying woodcuts), and including at least one pure enigma explicitly labelled as

such, Guérout's book seems highly opportunistic. It is not surprising to find that with Barthélemy Aneau, he would subsequently launch a parallel genre whose gestation and appearance seem deliberately linked with the publication of their emblems, namely, that of illustrated natural history.



4. Barthélemy Aneau, *Imagination poétique*, Lyons, 1552

Barthélemy Aneau's "Preface de cause" for *Imagination poétique* (1552), his own French translation of his Latin emblems published more or less simultaneously as *Picta poesis*, is particularly instructive for several reasons (fig. 4). Aneau (1510–61) was a learned humanist and professor of rhetoric who, like Alciato himself, was steeped in the classical tradition, and who had in fact produced his own vernacular French translation of Alciato's emblems (Alciato 1549). As Aneau recounts the origin of his book of emblems, they arose from a chance conversation he had had with the printer

Macé Bonhomme, the publisher of his Alciato translation, in whose shop he happened to see some small woodcuts for which Bonhomme had no texts, as the originals, if indeed any had existed, were lost: “estant un jour en sa maison, trouvoy quelques petites figures pourtraictes, & taillées, demandant à quoy elles seruoient: me respondit, À rien pour n’auoir point d’inscriptions propres à icelles, ou si aucunes en auoit euës, icelles estre perdues pour luy” (Aneau 1552a, 6). Aneau, according to his own version of the story, promised on the spot to remedy this defect, and, in his words, to raise the images from this mute death and bestow on them both voice and life through verses that he would compose: “Alors je estimant que sans cause n’auoient esté faictes, luy promis que de muetes, & mortes, je les rendroie parlantes, & vives: leur inspirant ame, par vive Poësie” (ibid.). The notion of the visual images as a mute, dead thing – a lifeless body<sup>14</sup> to be revived by the humanist text – will, a full century later, be central to the attempts of the great Jesuit visual theorist Claude-François Ménestrier to grapple with a definition and a theory of the emblem in the context of a plethora of related genres (see Loach 2002, Graham forthcoming 2017?, Graham 2016a).<sup>15</sup> It becomes clear a few lines later that although in Aneau’s emblems, the image in almost all cases<sup>16</sup> antedated the text, which thus had to be composed to suit the image, and not, as Aneau makes very clear he would have preferred, the reverse: in all other instances, he writes somewhat plaintively, “j’ay suyvy ma conjecture & divination, usant en cest oeuvre comme de la Metheline regle de plomb. Cestadire appropriant non les images aux parolles (comme il falloit) mais les parolles aux figures (comme j’estoie contrainct) les plus convenables qu’il me a esté possible” (ibid., 8).

Aneau’s preface thus offers us a more refined idea of the emblem: in keeping with that of Alciato, to be sure, given his insistence on the primary importance of the texts, but fully accommodating the interplay of image and text and even, albeit somewhat grudgingly, demonstrating a willingness to take the visual images as a starting point for an allegorical thought process that would result in the composition of a suitable text. By the time of his preface, therefore, it seems clear that the conception of the emblem as a necessarily bimodal form – didactic, enigmatic and allegorical – in which image and text were made to suit each other and meant to be read together.

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<sup>14</sup> In concluding his preface, Aneau renews the metaphor in an even more striking way, writing that the images had been not only mute but buried before he gave them light and life, writing his accompanying texts deliberately “Affin que les images ensevelies, & muetes, je ramenasse en lumiere & vie” (ibid., 8).

<sup>15</sup> In a forthcoming essay (Graham forthcoming 2017?), I discuss in more detail the enactment of this metaphor by Aneau in his own personal device as well as in his preface.

<sup>16</sup> Aneau advises the reader that he had new images cut for fewer than twenty texts of his composition.

The rapidity of this progress is remarkable: Alciato's first emblems had appeared only some twenty years earlier, but in that time, it appears that the public had grown used to the idea of emblematic specificity, even if the details of such particularity were never fully spelled by Aneau or by his contemporaries. Aneau, of course, was particularly well placed to appreciate the inner workings of the emblem, because of his earlier translation of Alciato, and it was thus unsurprising that he would be quick to see the potential in the woodcuts owned by Bonhomme.

By the time Georgette de Montenay's *Emblèmes ou devises chrestiennes* appeared for the first time fifteen years later, though, the alert reader could find clear traces of a conception of the emblem that had progressed beyond that of Aneau to a state in which the parallel activities of seeing and reading had nearly equal status in the author's expressed expectation of how her emblems would be consumed. In her dedicatory letter to Jeanne de Navarre, the author acknowledges her debt to Alciato, but in doing so, underscores a conception of the emblem in which text and image appear to have equal status in the reading process:

Alciat fait des Emblèmes exquis,  
Lesquels voyant de plusieurs requis,  
Desir me prit de commencer les miens,  
Lesquels je croy estre premier chrestiens.  
Il est besoin chercher de tous costés  
De l'appetit pour ces gens desgoustés:  
L'un attiré sera par la peinture,  
L'autre y joindra poësie & escriture. (Montenay 1571, A4v)

Given the fact that her book of emblems takes a Protestant stance at a time of religious conflict, the author clearly expects to become the target of her Catholic opponents, but expresses the conviction that their insults will not prevent plain readers of good faith from absorbing the lessons to be gleaned from reading and contemplating the images and texts of her emblems. Once again, reading and seeing are conjoined in her description:

Je voy desja de coeurs envenimez  
Jetter sur moy leurs charbons allumez.  
Mais j'ay espoir, que leurs brocards & rage  
Ne me feront aucun mal ny dommage,  
Et ne pourra leur malice engarder  
Le simple & doux de lire & regarder:  
Voire en notant d'esprit gentil & fin  
De chasqu'Emblésme & le but & la fin. (Montenay 1571, b1v)

In the remainder of her preface, she uses both textual and visual metaphors to integrate the bimedial status of her book. Some readers, she admits, will find shortcomings in her emblems just as they criticize the habits of preachers with whom they disagree: “Quand ces chrestiens Emblèmes ils liront”, she says, they will react in exactly the same way. Furthermore, she has already had occasion to note this behavior in her own presence; her description suggests readers finding fault with details in her depiction of Huguenot clothing or behavior (or is the fault in fact with the visual image created by the engraver Pierre Woeriot?):

Comme desja j’ay veu en ma presence,  
 Que, sans avoir egard à la sentence,  
 L’un une *mine* ou quelque *chappeau* note  
 Qui seroit mieux faict à la huguenotte:  
 L’autre me dit, que pour vray amour *feindre*,  
 Ne le devois en ceste sorte *peindre*. (ibid.; emphasis added)

Regardless of whether the depiction is visual or textual, her use of strongly visual words such as “feindre” [feign] and “peindre” [paint], and her reference to facial expressions or body language (“mine” [expression]) and to details of dress (“chappeau” [hat]) strongly suggests that she has both her own text and Woeriot’s engravings in mind, and that they have equal status in her conception of the emblem. This conceptual integration of text and image, of course, is underscored even more strongly by the fact that the *inscriptions* of Georgette de Montenay’s emblems are themselves incorporated into Woeriot’s emblematic engravings, thus blending image and text in a strikingly new way.

Further evidence of this coalescing understanding of the emblem as intrinsically bimedial and as thus depending on an iterative interplay of an enigmatic image with a text whose function would be to guide readers progressively toward some intended reading through an iterative reading process involving both visual “body” and textual “soul” may be found in Pierre Joly’s preface to the 1588 edition of Jean-Jacques Boissard’s Latin emblems, to which Joly had added a vernacular “interpretation.” Joly’s makes very clear his deep respect for Boissard’s originals, and goes on to describe his own understanding of the emblematic reading process, which so thoroughly combines the useful with the pleasing, the labour of decipherment leading to the joy of a full understanding:

Je n’ignore pas touteffois que partie de la delectation, qui se doit puiser en ce labour, consiste en la recherche que l’on fait comme à tâton, de l’exacte & vraye signification de la peinture; laquelle ayant tenu quelque temps l’esprit en suspens; & venant finalement à estre rencontrée, le ravit en



admiration; & contente d'autant plus, que sous un voile agreable, il descouvre je ne çay quoy de doctrine & enseignement utile & profitable à la civile conversation & commune societé des hommes. (Boissard 1588, 6–7)

The earliest French prefaces, then, seem unsurprisingly to be characterized by an initial fragmentary understanding of the emblem, by consequent lack of consensus on the exact nature of the emblematic enterprise, but by a growing awareness of emblematic specificity over the course of the first 30 years of emblem book production. Originally motivated primarily by a desire to cash in on a commercial boom, authors, translators, engravers, and printer/publishers were not long to realize, however, that they could achieve greater success in the market by refining and clarifying their understanding of the emblem and by emphasizing their adherence to its emerging core features: its essential bimodality, its allegorical and didactic nature, its progressive movement from generality to particularity (as readers gradually come to understand not only a general moral lesson but to apply it to their own situation). Yet little of this bears any clear resemblance to what we think of today as a true “theory” of the emblem. For the birth of emblem theory, readers would need to wait for the appearance, in the next century, of the first treatises devoted to the emblem.

#### **PROTO-THEORETICAL TREATISES SEEN THROUGH THE LENS OF THEORY**

Before discussing some of the increasingly theoretical treatises on the emblem and its companion genres that appeared in France during the seventeenth century, it is worth taking a moment to make clear what I mean by “theory” in what follows. While there are many definitions of the word, and many sources to which one might turn in search of a comprehensive definition, the Oxford dictionary seems a good place to begin. The main definition it gives is “A supposition or a system of ideas intended to explain something, especially one based on general principles independent of the thing to be explained”, with the first sub-definition being, “A set of principles on which the practice of an activity is based” (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/theory>). To these core statements, scientists add others: good theories are frequently said to *falsifiable*, *parsimonious*, and *consistent*: in other words, they can be tested and proven wrong (though never proven right), they explain much in few words, and their several parts are harmonious. It results from this that good theories have both *explanatory* and *predictive* power: they both enable an understanding of the essential elements of a phenomenon, and on the basis of that understanding, predict future variants as yet undiscovered. Darwin’s evolutionary theory provides excellent examples: the concept of natural

selection and adaptive mutation brilliantly explains how a single ancestor species, after arriving from South America, gave rise to more than a dozen species of finches in the Galápagos Islands, each with structures and habits adapted to its own diet and habitat. Twenty years after Darwin's death, it was discovered that as he had predicted, a species of sphinx moth (*Xanthopan morgani*, or "Morgan's sphinx") with a proboscis measuring some 30 cm. was in fact responsible for the pollination of the orchid *Angraecum sesquipedale*, a fact deduced by Darwin simply from his examination of the plant's structure.<sup>17</sup>

When Darwin published his theory in *The Origin of Species* in 1859, of course, he owed a huge debt to the contributions of scientists whose work in itself provided neither the explanations for the variations in structure and function of living things nor the ability to predict the future discovery of new species on the basis of existing data. Much of that vital preliminary labor was provided by meticulously descriptive scholars such as Linnaeus (Carl von Linné, 1707–78), whose early taxonomies laid the foundations for a truly methodical and comprehensive descriptive system that could ultimately be extended to encompass all living things. This work was not theoretical, but practical, but without the rigorous descriptive systems created by Linnaeus and his successors, Darwin could not have done the analysis of adaptation that led him to formulate the theory of evolution.

In current emblem theory, then, we might think of the view, frequently expressed by Peter M. Daly and others, following in the wake of German theoreticians of the early twentieth century, that the emblem is first and foremost a (tripartite) form, and that any deviation from that ideal results in a defective emblem or in a transformation to another genre. We might add to such purely formal considerations Daniel Russell's insight that the emblem is primarily a process of allegorical composition and reading rather than a form. Many scholars have found a unifying principle of emblem theory in the notion of the emblem as a cultural construction and as a mode of thought peculiar to a moment in time between the first publication of Alciato's emblems by Steyner and the gradual subsidence of the emblem into a static set of templates for designers toward the end of the seventeenth century. Each of these explanations has merit; each meets the tests of theory outlined above. All, alas, are not only falsifiable but demonstrably false, or at best incomplete. To any purely formal theoretical encapsulation of the emblem, one may adduce the enormous range of structural variation so readily visible

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<sup>17</sup> There are many accounts of this prediction; Wikipedia provides an accessible and readable one ("Xanthopan morgani").

in the emblem.<sup>18</sup> Russell himself passed from a view of the emblem as process to one in which the emblem was seen as the outcome of a process. Those who see in the emblem the expression of a cultural phenomenon peculiar to its time tend to find emblems wherever they look, so that ultimately it becomes well nigh impossible to state with certainty what gives the emblem its specificity: in the end, being everywhere, it is nowhere to be found.

Recently, I have been increasingly of the view that the solution to the problem of emblem theory must lie in some synthesis of these approaches. In formal terms, such an approach would both insist on a small number of structural characteristics including bimodality and fragmentation; with regard to the process, it would incorporate such essential elements as allegory and an iterative reading process that enables the attentive and diligent reader to pass from enigma to enlightenment and from the appreciation of a general situation expressed in terms of long ago, far away, or both to an intense realization of the need to personalize and internalize that lesson, and to apply it to her or his own daily life and conduct. Where European emblematic culture is concerned, it would distinguish clearly between the emblem and the emblematic, and between the truly emblematic (often called the “applied emblem”) and what might be called an “emblematic reminiscence” in which verbal or visual techniques that remind us of those deployed in emblem books are brought into play.<sup>19</sup> The advantage of such an approach is twofold. First, it enables us to situate the emblem clearly in a multi-dimensional space in which its relationships with other genres are clear: on every axis, the emblem will lie at a point not occupied by another genre. Second, it enables the explanation of phenomena not readily explained by other means.

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<sup>18</sup> See, for examples of counter-argument, Miedema 1968, Mödersheim 2005, Russell 1985, Russell 1982, Graham 2005a, Russell 1995; Miedema is particularly direct in his refutation of this idea. Russell 1995 is very good on the subject of emblematic presence in other facets of early modern culture, though many other scholars have also treated a wide variety of aspects of this subject in detail. Michael Bath has made huge strides in documenting the applied emblematic presence in early modern Scotland.

<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere, I have suggested –in keeping with these principles– that the emblem is “a unique bimodal (hybrid) *moralizing polyform* . . . in which a superficially enigmatic and fluid visual image is progressively deciphered through iterative reading of a series of cross-references between the textual fragments and the image to create a generally applicable lesson that individual readers then apply to themselves in the context of their own circumstances as a logical conclusion to their reading” (Graham 2016c, 31).

One example of such a phenomenon concerns the transfer of emblems from printed to semi-private, private, and intimate space.<sup>20</sup> Many such instances are known, and they display a variety of phenomena not easily explained by traditional theoretical frameworks. Two of these enigmatic tendencies are *personalization* and *truncation*. In Alexander Seton's gallery at his manor house Pinkie, in Musselburgh, Scotland, Michael Bath has drawn attention to two significant changes in the image and text of what is clearly a personalized version of an emblem ("Nihil amplius optat") from Vaenius. In the image, the generic male figure of the Vaenius emblem has been replaced by what is quite clearly a portrait of Seton himself; the text has been altered from the third to the first person (i.e., from "optat" to "opto"). It seems clear, then, that Seton, the owner of this gallery and of this construction is speaking to the viewer from the confines of the painted image. In a similar way, Lady Anne Bacon Drury<sup>21</sup> adapted a text from Cicero to her own use, placing it above of emblematic constructions, each consisting of a brief motto and an image: Cicero had written, of his propensity to take a trunk of books with him to read during his travels so that he might never be alone, "nunquam minus solus quam cum solus" (never less alone than when alone). Drury feminizes the text, altering "solus" to "sola", and thus appears to be making it her own in order to use it as a framework text for her reading of the emblematic constructions displayed on the panel beneath it.

In both these spaces, one private, the other intimate, the emblematic constructions are essentially bipartite rather than tripartite, each consisting of an image and a brief textual inscription. The resulting combination of personalization and formal truncation has led some scholars who have studied such spaces to conclude that the original emblems were somehow transformed into personal devices. But this cannot be the case, for the overwhelming majority of the image-text combinations fail to meet one of the standard simple tests for the device (they depict human figures, introduce words into the image, look back rather than forward, and so forth). Are they then "defective emblems" or perhaps "emblem-devices"? My own contention is that they remain emblems in full, and that both personalization and truncation are readily explained by the built context in which they are found. The owners of these spaces, having thoroughly internalized the lessons originally conveyed in part by the explanatory texts that would have

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<sup>20</sup> A recent article by Michael Bath is essential to this discussion, and an early version of his text was instrumental in enabling me to formulate my own, somewhat different views in a conference paper that remains unpublished (Bath 2016, Graham 2015).

<sup>21</sup> Concerning her painted emblematic closet, see Meakin 2013.

been included with the originals, could afford to discard that text in transferring the emblems to their own spaces.

They could do so, first, because they no longer needed the full text for the emblem to serve its purpose: having absorbed its lesson and applied to their own situation, they could readily make do with the image and inscription alone, simply calling the text (or a remembered paraphrase thereof) to mind as necessary, or conceivably altering the text to suit their own circumstances more appropriately. Additionally, the truncation renders the emblem entirely opaque to other viewers, who will be unable to decipher the full import of the emblems; it thus defines the space as one in which the owner controls the outcome of any visit by an outsider, and functions as a statement of power: power over one's own temptations, to be sure, but power over others, too. The iterative reading process remains, but is partially carried out in an abstract rather than in a concrete context: seeing the image, reading the inscription, recalling the original text and lesson to mind, the owner of such a contemplative space can re-enact each emblem at will in a way forever concealed from outsiders, or perhaps selectively revealed to a few chosen guests in a way of his or her own devising.

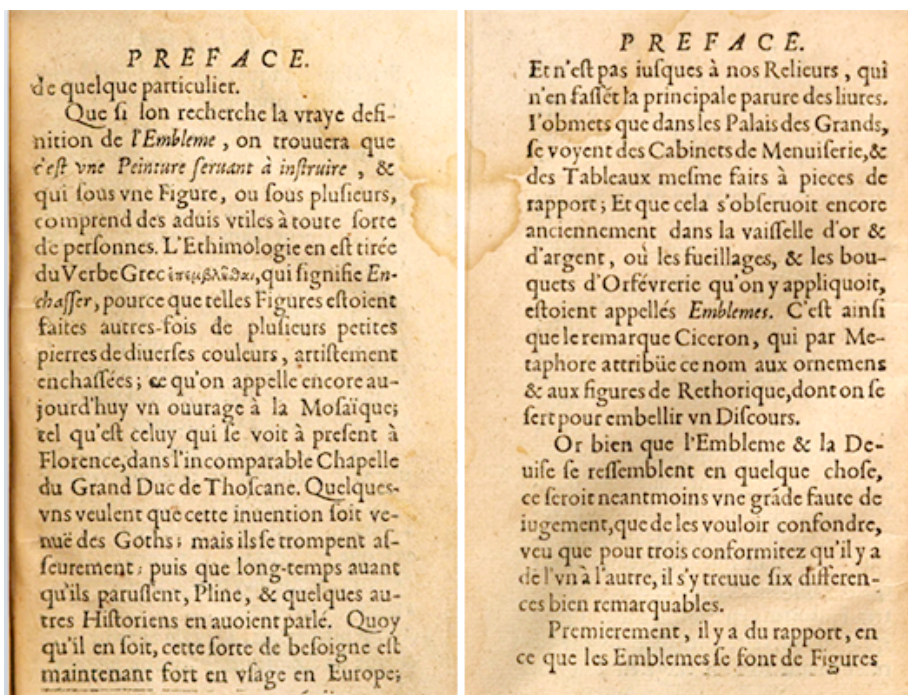
What I have just described, of course, is a scholarly dialogue enabled by the enormous theoretical strides made by scholars of the emblem since the mid-twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> Similar processes were at work in connection with the emblem and with other cognate genres during the first half of the seventeenth century that would eventually lead to the publication of the first works that we may legitimately characterize as “theoretical” in nature, namely, those of the Jesuit systematizer Claude-François Ménestrier and his contemporaries, although it must be admitted that even those earliest theoretical works remain far more descriptive—and prescriptive—in nature than the theories of the emblem current today. Jean Baudoin's preface to his 1638 *Recueil d'emblemes divers* (fig. 5) provides an instructive starting point for the consideration of how emblem theory had evolved since the earliest prefaces, and for how it would evolve over the next half century. It is striking to note that where the early prefaces of Corrozet, La Perrière, Guérault, and Aneau either set aside the image more or less entirely or treat it as a phenomenon secondary to the text, Baudoin begins his preface by underscoring the Emblem's place in an esthetic in which the visual image occupies pride of place.

Baudoin begins with the image of the divine book of nature, in which the learned may see reflected the hand of the Creator; in a similar way, the ancient Egyptians developed their mysterious hieroglyphs, each of which embodied a hidden meaning, so that virtuous actions could be signified by

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<sup>22</sup> I have described this in more detail in Graham 2016c.

natural figures. Emblems, he assures the reader, continue this didactic tradition. At that point, however, Baudoin takes an odd turn: emblems, he says, “passent pour Devises, quand ils se rapportent directement a faire connoistre l’intention de quelque particulier” (Baudoin 1638, e1v–e2r). For Baudoin, then, emblem and device appear to be essentially equivalent in their origin, their intention, and their structure: what separates them is that the device represents a personal aspiration. This is both a key insight and a source of error, because it leads Baudoin, as it will lead other thinkers, to see the emblem and the device as essentially the same from a structural and functional point of view.



5. Jean Baudoin, *Recueil d'emblemés divers*, Paris, 1638  
 Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek, [urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb109220](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb109220)

This confusion is not new, of course: Claude Paradin’s *Devises heroiques* provides an example from the previous century of what appears to be a deliberate confusion between the genres. Paradin’s dedicatory preface to the first edition of the book (1551) cleverly constructs a history of the device that accounts for its traditional bipartite structure: to the painted arms borne on their shields, he suggests, nobles came to add a few words “servans à l’intelligence pour gens lettrez,” so that the sense of their device would be

more apparent to anyone who could read (Paradin 1551, 5). Like many of his contemporaries, Paradin is careful to lend to his devices the authority of ancient traditions; “comme l’Egyptien s’aydoit à exprimer son intention, par ses lettres Hieroglifiques: quasi par mesme moyen, se pourra ayder le vulgaire ignorant, à congnoitre & aymer la Vertu” (ibid., 7). This sentence quite clearly leads in the direction of blending of the device and the emblem, as the original purpose of the personal device (to express an individual aspiration, character trait, or accomplishment) is transmuted into that of the emblem, which is to lead the reader to internalize a moral lesson. In the case of Paradin’s devices, of course, the idea is presumably that common readers, seeing and understanding the devices of the noble and virtuous, will model themselves on their betters.

The second edition of Paradin’s devices, which appeared only half a dozen years later, adds a striking new phrase immediately following the words just quoted: “se pourra ayder le vulgaire ignorant, à congnoitre & aymer la Vertu, joint que davantage y pourra voir certaines petites Scholies sus icelles” (Paradin 1557, 5). This of course reflects the fact that each device is now accompanied by a prose text giving an account of its origin and suggesting to the reader a correct interpretation. In other words, the two-part devices are now tripartite, a transformation that brings them in line with the standard (but by no means universal) *emblema triplex*. It is hard not to see in this addition and in the revision to the preface a deliberate attempt to present the devices as emblematic and thus a further example of the rush to capitalize on the “emblem craze” discussed earlier in this essay. As we shall see, this deliberate confusion would persist throughout the seventeenth century, and would considerably hinder the efforts of subsequent theorists to identify the emblem’s specificity and to separate it clearly from its near relations.

Baudoin, then, is by no means the first writer to draw the parallel between emblem and device. His preface, however, is original in developing a historical and descriptive framework that strives to construct a synthetic view of the emblem. To achieve this, Baudoin first provides a concise definition of the emblem, which is in his view “une Peinture servant à instruire, & qui sous une Figure, ou sous plusieurs, comprend des advis utiles à toute sorte de personnes” (Baudoin 1638, c2r). He then states its etymology to the Greek verb ἐπεμβλήσθαι, and in doing so, clearly seems to be basing himself directly on Claude Mignault’s learned “treatise on

symbols” which forms a substantial part of the preface to the Plantin editions of Alciato.<sup>23</sup>

Baudoin’s preface, in its popularization of Mignault, thus represents an important step in the creation of a vernacular theory of the emblem. In that regard, the most interesting section of the preface involves Baudoin’s attempts to distinguish between emblem and device, which, as we have seen, earlier writers had deliberately brought together. For Baudoin, confusing the two bespeaks a gross error of judgment (“une grande faute de jugement”), though he actually weakens his argument by immediately proposing three points of similarity between the two genres, and by endorsing the view of those previous thinkers who have asserted that perfection in the emblem consists in making it resemble the device as closely as possible (Baudoin 1638, c2v–c3r). The three points of similarity described by Baudoin are as follows: first, both emblem and device embody mute figures that nonetheless “speak through signs” (“toutes muëttes qu’elles sont, ne laissent pas de parler par signes”); second, that both emblem and device can be composed of figures alone, and indeed that this is the more common practice, though the combination of words and images is also perfectly acceptable; third, that both are able to represent abstract concepts such as virtues and vices by means of their essential qualities (“par ce qu’elles ont de propre”).

Baudoin goes on to identify six important differences. In essence, these differences are presented in such a way as to make clear that Baudoin views the emblem primarily as a formal deviation from the ideal device. In this, he is the faithful successor of the Italian theorists whose work will form the basis of later attempts by Henri Estienne and Claude-François Ménestrier, among others, to theorize the bimedial genres. Unlike the austere device, limited to a single main figure, the emblem permits visual embellishments; emblems, unlike devices, may accommodate an explanatory text; because of the presence of such a text, emblems may depict fabulous and strange creations, whereas the device, lacking the textual support, must be more readily interpretable by the viewer; depiction of the human figure is permitted in the emblem, and not in the device; devices, because of their aspirational character, never look back, unlike the emblem, which commonly relies on events from classical antiquity; finally, the foundation of the emblem must be plausible, because the point of the emblem is to teach a truth. These points of supposed difference, largely derived from earlier writers on the *impresa*, are clearly prescriptive in nature rather than truly theoretical. On a morphological level, they are largely

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<sup>23</sup> Baudoin does in fact acknowledge his debt to Mignault (c7v). For a full account by Drysdall of Mignault’s thinking on the emblem and its relationship to Ramist thought, see Drysdall 2001.



accurate, but Baudoin's frank admission that he could list many more such differences<sup>24</sup> makes clear that his list does not correspond to the criteria for theory that I listed at the beginning of this section. No mere enumeration of differences between two forms, in other words, will ever result in the generation of a set of principles on the basis of which new examples may be produced or predicted.

Such reliance on descriptive enumeration would continue to bedevil the development of emblem theory not only through the remainder of the seventeenth century but far beyond. When, for example, Ari Wesseling writes of Hadrianus Junius that "[b]revity is another novel element in early emblem theory" (Wesseling 2011, 230) it may readily be seen that he is repeating Junius' own prescriptive statement and not formulating a true principle of emblematic composition. While Junius himself did strive for brevity –and complained about the effort of doing so in the preface to his own volume of emblems with four-line verse texts, as Wesseling correctly notes (*ibid.*, and n. 38)– his admonitions in this regard entirely lack predictive power and are readily falsifiable, since many books of emblems contain texts that are anything but brief. Whatever the esthetic ideal, it remained an aspiration rather than an accurate description, let alone an explanation of anything to do with emblematic specificity.

Alison Saunders has written a very useful summary of the efforts of French authors and theoreticians to distinguish between the emblem and the device in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though even she is driven to confess that despite an apparent early simplicity, the seventeenth century sees increasing confusion as "the theorists become more voluble" (Saunders 1993, 247) and as the forms themselves continue to evolve, with increasingly complex devices becoming ever harder to distinguish from emblems. But once again, it is apparent from her examination of the literature that by far the greater part of what we may think of as "theoretical" is in fact not theoretical at all, but descriptive and prescriptive in nature. In large part, this tendency is no doubt driven by the insistence of the authors of treatises that there must be unique elements that will help them to define and distinguish the genres, but it is clear that their enumerations are almost without exception taxonomic in nature. One sympathizes entirely with Daniel Russell's acerbic conclusion that

the endless litany of postulates, rules, provisos and distinctions in the treatises on the emblematic forms leaves one with the impression that the discussion was even more confused, the various questions even more

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<sup>24</sup> "[J]'en pourrais adjoûter quantité d'autres" (c5r).

vexed, at the end of the 17th century than at the beginnings of the debate in Italy more than a hundred years earlier. (Russell 1985, 161)

I have argued elsewhere (Graham 2016a) that the most fundamental distinction to be made between the two versions of Claude-François Ménéstrier's *L'Art des emblemes* (Ménéstrier 1684, Ménéstrier 1662) is that a careful comparison suggests a movement on Ménéstrier's part from the kind of pre-modern taxonomic and descriptive/prescriptive approach that prompted Russell's despair to something resembling some schools of modern theory.<sup>25</sup> Henri Estienne's *L'Art de faire les devises* (Estienne 1645) anticipates both in name and in style Ménéstrier's first version of *L'Art des emblemes*. The full title of the work is revealing: *L'Art de faire des devises, où il est traicté des hiéroglyphiques, symboles, emblèmes, aenygmes, sentences, paraboles, revers de médailles, armes, blasons, cimiers, chiffres et rébus, avec un traicté des rencontres ou mots plaisans*. Such a title speaks volumes about the sheer intractability, by the middle of the seventeenth century, of successfully delineating the contours of these various genres, and a reading of Estienne's treatise amply bears out such an intuition.

It is telling that the first word of Estienne's preface is "Ruscelli", for throughout his treatment of the device, the pervasive influence of Ruscelli and other Italian theorists of the *impresa* –including Bargagli, Giovio, Contile, Tesauro, Palazzi, and Simeoni– is apparent, even though Giovio, "qui a le premier entrepris ce voyage," is pre-eminent (ibid., 70). In his admiration for Giovio and in his eagerness to cite him as the primary authority on the device, Estienne anticipates Ménéstrier. In chapter after chapter, just as Ménéstrier would do fifteen years later, he quotes and paraphrases extensively from his Italian predecessors, prescribing rule upon rule, splitting hair after hair in a praiseworthy but ultimately sterile and futile attempt to accomplish through sheer enumeration what only theory would later enable, that is to say a comprehensive statement of the operating principles that govern the emblem's production and consumption and that separate it once and for all from the device, despite the persistence of a "gray zone" in which emblem and device collide and intersect.

Estienne's work, like the first version of Ménéstrier's *Art des emblemes*, thus represents both a summit of achievement and a dead end for emblematic proto-theory. These authors intuited that a theory of the emblem and of the device was needed in order to explain the huge corpus of existing

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<sup>25</sup> Specifically, I contend that in the later version of the work, it may be possible to detect for the first time the signs of what today we might call a "data driven" or "evidence-based" approach rather than a descriptive/prescriptive framework derived from authority and tradition rather than from scientific observation.

material explicitly called emblematic, not just in emblem books but in the many applied derivatives to which the emblem had given rise: emblematic portraits, ceramics, trenchers, festivals, medals, galleries, embroideries and tapestries, and tombstones. Because no amount of enumeration could ever succeed in taming it, their heroic attempt to bring this disparate and apparently chaotic welter of emblematic productions under control was doomed to fail, but must have left them with a growing sense of frustration. Perhaps in the end it was that sheer frustration that impelled Ménestrier, in 1684, to produce a work, the second version of the *Art des emblemes*, in which the first glimmers of modern theory are at last apparent.

Perhaps in the end it was that sheer frustration that impelled Ménestrier, in 1684, to produce a work, the second version of the *Art des emblemes*, in which the first glimmers of modern theory are at last apparent. Whatever the proximate cause, however, it is clear that his abundant corpus of work on the emblem and the other bimedial genres did not arise solely from his consideration of the many Italian authorities on the *impresa* whom he cites, nor even from the combination of his reading of those writers and his direct practical experience and acquired knowledge of the emblem. Whether or not Ménestrier was aware of the debt he owed to early modern proto-theory –to the many authors of emblem texts whose musings on the object of their activity grace their prefaces, and to the producers and consumers of emblems whose words actions indirectly reveal the deep commercial and intellectual penetration it enjoyed before his time– his work marks a new stage –important but incremental– on the road to what would later become, in our own time, a true theory of the emblem. As Alciato himself had written in the emblem that provides the epigraph to this essay, the “holy oaks” of proto-theory stand firm, and the faint but audible sound of their dry leaves rustling should inform our reading not only of Ménestrier but of all subsequent emblem theorists.



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