THE 'EMBLEMATIC' AS A WAY OF THINKING AND SEEING IN RENAISSANCE CULTURE

György E. Szönyi (University of Szeged)

INTRODUCTION

As is well known, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance looked at words and pictures as tightly connected and interrelated systems of cultural representation ('ut pictura poesis'). In this sense we can suggest that those periods were the true forerunners of our multimedial age. This connection justifies the growing interest in emblem studies and related fields that have been expanding and thriving since the late 1970s.

In this paper I am going to revisit first the foundations of emblem theory and the achievements of emblem research, also paying attention to the concerns of poststructuralist literary and cultural theory. Following this, I shall introduce the concept of 'emblematic' as a characteristic way of thinking-and-seeing in Renaissance culture. The examination of this mode of representation is particularly important because it dominated medieval and early modern artistic expression as well as theological and philosophical thought. It can be opposed to the 'naturalistic style' of the ancient Greeks and Romans, however, from the 16th century onwards, the two coexisted in the garment of the newly 'rediscovered' classicism.[1]

The influence of the emblematic way of seeing can still be felt in our present day culture, although it should be born in mind that by today emblematic structures and their representational logic have become largely obsolete. This fact is due to the dramatic changes in the school curricula which resulted over the 20th century in the diminishing of the classical and Judeo-Christian traditions and their symbolism. This tendency has made more difficult to understand those works that were created with an assumption of such general knowledge. In order to help interpretation, art history already in the early 20th century worked out the methods of iconography and iconology.[2] These are still useful today, although in the light of postmodern challenges we also have to see their limitations.

What is the perspective of the future, then, a general reader or museum goer may ask, who is not prepared for meticulous cultural-historical-iconographical studies and who only occasionally comes across elements of tradition-bound symbolism in his readings or touristic travels. The cultural historian's answer to this dilemma is not entirely optimistic. In the long run the semiotic messages coded in emblematic and iconographic structures will share the fate of scholastic philosophy or alchemical speculations: they will disappear from everyday thinking and become the special field of interest of scholars and/or hermetic-enthusiastic circles.

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[1] The usual contrasting of the emblematic and the naturalistic ways of seeing is only a rather crude cultural typology as can be seen in an attractive semiotic garment in the works of Jury Lotman (e.g. "Problems in the Typology of Cultures," 1977). The most vulnerable point of such typologies is chronology, since the progress of culture is always transitional and it rarely splits into easily distinguishable periods as typologies would like to demonstrate. Art historians as well as scholars of literature and culture have identified many examples of 'naturalism' from the Gothic and Renaissance periods alike which all intertwined with techniques of emblematic and symbolic expression, too(see Panofsky's theory of 'hidden symbolism,' according to which perfectly 'realistic' images can also carry symbolic significance – Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting* [1953], 131-48).

[2] See primarily Aby Warburg's (1932, 1980, 1999) and Erwin Panofsky's (1939, 1960, 1993 [1955]) classical studies in the list of references.

In the present transitory age, however, when we have already lost the 'natural' understanding of conventional iconographical messages, but when the fables and images of classical and Judeo-Christian mythology still heavily characterize our culture (quite often reaching down to the level of advertisements[3]), the research of 'emblematics' has by no means become simply the 'archeology of the past.' It also offers a way to maintain and develop our cultural identity. My paper is intended to facilitate this process.

1 THE EMBLEM

1.1 Definitions and Theories

The renowned researcher of emblems, Mario Praz called attention to a remark of Diderot, in which the French encyclopedist applauded the *Gesamtkunst*-nature of this hybrid genre:

There is a spirit in the poetic discourse which enlivens all the syllables. What is this spirit? [. . .] It makes possible that things become told and represented at the same time. And it makes that in the very same moment when reason comprehends [the things], the soul becomes exalted by them, the imagination sees them, the ears hear them, [. . .] and it will even be like the fabric of crowded hieroglyphs which paint [the idea]. I could say that in this sense poetry as such is emblematic.[4]

One of the top achievements of such early modern emblematic works was Michael Maier's *Atalanta fugiens*, a multimedial collection of alchemical emblems where the pictures and poems were complemented by a set of musical fugues, too, thus bringing the audience to perfect and esoteric comprehension.[5] Both Maier's emblematic program and Diderot's comment are in harmony with the ancient desire of humankind to represent by means of mixed media such complex phenomena that could not be successfully evoked by a single sign-system.

Praz also quotes Schopenhauer's more sober 19th-century definition of the emblem, which not only deals with the effects of emblems but refers to its generic family, too:

The name of "emblems" is usually given to simple allegorical designs accompanied by an

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[3] It is enough to remind of Erwin Panofsky's famous essay on the iconography of the Rolls Royce-grill (see Panofsky, "The Ideological Antecedents of the Rolls-Royce Radiator" [1963], 273-88), or the studies of Peter Daly on the presence of Biblical motifs in contemporary advertisements: "Adam and Eve in the Garden of Advertising. (The Use of Visual Christian Symbols in Western Advertising)," in Szőnyi ed. 1996, 77-88; "The *Nachleben* of the Emblem. Emblematic Structures in Modern Advertising and Propaganda." In Harms–Peil ed. 2002, 47-70.

[4] "Il passe alors dans le discours du poëte un esprit qui en meut et vivifie toutes les syllabes. Qu'est-ce que cet esprit? ... c'est lui qui fait que les choses sont dites et représentées tout à la fois; que dans le męme temps que l'entendement les saisit,l'âmeen est émue,l'imagination les voitet l'oreille les entend ... c'est encore un tissu d'hiéroglyphes entassés les uns sur les autres qui la [la pensée] peignent. Je pourrais dire, en ce sens, que toute poésie est emblématique." *Lettre sur les sourds et les muets*, quoted in Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery* (1964), 14.

[5] On the semiotics of Maier's alchemical emblem see my article: "Occult Semiotics and Iconology: Michael Maier's Alchemical Emblems," in Enenkel, Visser ed. (2003), forthcoming.

explanatory motto and destined to teach in an intuitive form a moral truth. [. . .] They form a transition to poetical allegory. [. . .] Since in poetical allegory a datum always results in a concept which one tries to make apprehensible by intuition through an image, one can well allow that a painted figure may sometimes be introduced either to accompany or support the expression; but such an image should not be considered as a work of representational art, but rather as a hieroglyphic sign.[6]

To continue with definitions, let us have a brief survey of encyclopedias and literary handbooks. All such summaries agree that the word 'emblem' has two basic meanings: the original Greek expression refers to 'embellishments' or added decorations on sculptural structures of pieces of applied art (mirror frames, dishes, vases). The second meaning points to a special, symbolic way of expression.[7] From this sense perhaps most interesting is the heading in the *Grosses vollständiges Universal Lexicon* (1734), since it excludes the symbolic expression from the definition of the emblem and calls it a *Sinn-Bild*, i.e. 'symbol.' Here we find an explanation according to which the Latin 'emblema' or the French 'emblème' or 'devise' mean such a composition where the combination of a picture and connecting words reveal some secret meaning and leads the reader to further reflections. From a gender-biased viewpoint it is worth remembering that according to this explanation the picture is the body while the text is the soul.[8] This notion from the newer definitions has been excluded, on the other hand the fact that emblems as a literary genre were invented in the time of Humanism is usually emphasized.

Probably the inventor and the first master of the genre was Andrea Alciati (Alciato), who published his *Emblematum liber* in 1531. The collection contained moralizing pictures

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[6] Schopenhauer, *Die Welt...*, 1:3, 50. Quoted by Praz 1964, 15.

[7] I have compared the definitions of the following encyclopedias (in chronological order): *Grosses vollständiges Universal Lexicon*, Leipzig: Johann Sedler, 1734, 8:987 [Emblema]; 37:1690 [Sinnbild]; *Encyklopedyja powszechna*, Warszawa: Orgelbrand, 1861, 1984, 8:271; *Enciclopedia Italiana*, Roma, 1932, 1949, 13:861-5 [article by Mario Praz]; *Reallexikon zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, Stuttgart, 1959, 5:85-228 [article by William Heckscher and Karl-August Wirth]; *Der Grosse Brockhaus*. Wiesbaden: F. A. Brockhaus, 1978, 3:436; *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1989, 5:163.

[8] Ist ein Gemahlde welches in einem Bilde und wenig beygesetsten Worten, einen verborgenen Sinn erweiset, welcher zu ferneren Nachdencken veranlasset. Das Bild wird für den Leib, die Schrifft für die Seele eines Sinn-Bildes geachtet weil jenes mancherley und offt wiederwärtige Deutungen haben kan, die aber durch die Uberschrifft oder das Beywort unterschieden und beschräncket werden (37:1690). A huge scholarly literature deals with Renaissance and Baroque theories. E.g. Bath, "The Philosophy of Symbols" (1994, 130-55); Bath, "'Emblem' as Rhetorical Figure" (1999, 51-62); Drysdall, "The Emblem According to the Italian Impresa Theorists" (1992, 22-32); Heckscher–Wirth, "Emblema, Emblembuch" (1959); Höltgen, "The Emblematic Theory and Practice..." (1994, 338-62); Scholz, "Das Emblem als Textorte und als Genre" (1989, 289-308); Scholz, "The Brevity of Pictures..." (1994, 315-38); Scholz, "Emblematik: Entstehung und Erscheinungsweisen" (1992); Scholz, "Counting the Figures in Emblems and Devices...," (1996, 161-75); Sulzer, *Traktate zur Emblematik* (1992); Tribe, "Word and Image in Emblematic Painting" (1992). In Hungarian scholarly literature it was Tibor Fabiny who reconsidered the status of the emblem-genre (see his "Literature and Emblems: NewAspects in Shakespeare-Studies" [1984]); important analysis of emblem theory has been carried out by Éva Knapp, especially in her recent monograph, *Irodalmi emblematika Magyarországon a XVI-XVIII. században* [Literary emblematics in 16-18th-CenturyHungary] (2003). On theoretical questions see also my "Semiotics and Hermeneutics of Iconographical Systems" (1996a) and "The Powerful Image: Towards a Typology of Occult Symbolism" (1996b).

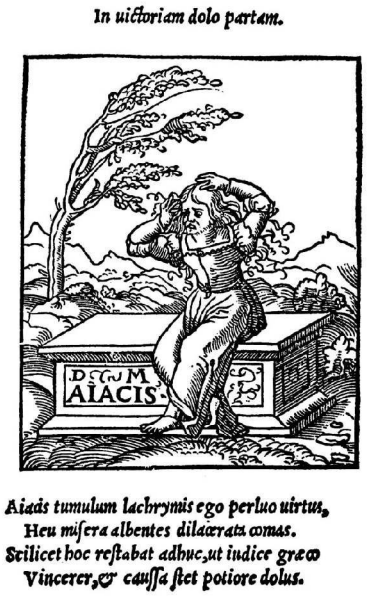

Figure 1

completed by mottoes above and short, explanatory poems following them. This is how the tripartite structure of *inscriptio*, *pictura* and *subscriptio* has been forged (FIGURE 1). The small work made a big career in Renaissance and Baroque Europe: during the 16th and 17th centuries more than one thousand emblem books were published, mostly in Latin, later in a variety of national languages which in turn also further developed Alciati's original invention.[9]

Before I start reviewing the scholarly debates concerning the typology of emblems, I would like to refer to an understanding of the term 'emblem' in a wider sphere of reference. The definitions in the Oxford English Dictionary call our attention to the possibility of specifying the emblem not only as a tripartite composite genre, but also as a significant class of symbolic images and tropes. According to the OED 'emblems' can be:

> 1/ An ornament of inlaid work – *obs.* ➢ 2/ A drawing or a picture expressing a moral fable or allegory; a fable or allegory such as might be expressed pictorially – *obs.* ➢ 3a/ A picture of an object (or the object itself) serving as a symbolical representation of an abstract quality, an action, state of things, class of persona, etc. ➢ 3b/ In wider sense: a symbol, typical representation. Sometimes applied to a person. The 'type,' personification(of some virtue or quality). ➢4/ A figured object used with symbolic meaning, as the distinctive badge of a person, family,

The first meaning refers to the original Greek term mentioned above. According to the second, the emblem is a picture which involves a moral teaching or allegorical meaning – there is no mention of accompanying words here. According to the third definition, it is the representation of such an object which itself has symbolic reference to an abstract notion, an action or a person. In an even wider context the emblem is such a symbol that personifies something 'typical,' such as a virtue or some quality. Finally, under meaning four we find such symbolic images which are suitable to identify a group of people, a nation, a profession, a rank, etc. Interestingly, the emblem as strict, literary genre is not even mentioned in the OED. This should warn us not to approach the debate of definition from a too dogmatic angle, since we can clearly see the difference between the general and specific uses of the term. This has to be

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[9] Following the research of Mario Praz, Heckscher and Wirth (1959, 147) mention about 1000 emblem books, however the leading authority of recent research, Peter Daly speaks about more than 6000 such publications all over Europe and in the European *Kulturkreis* between 1531 and 1900 (Daly 1998, 4n12). All of these are described in the Union Catalogue of Emblem Books database (about this see Daly, "The Union Catalogue of Emblem Books Project and the *Corpus Librorum Emblematum*" (1988). See also Henkel–Schöne, *Emblemata* (1967, xxiv-xxv); on English emblem books Freeman 1948 and Bath 1994; on Hungarian emblems cf. the literature on the internationally important output of János Zsámboky [=Johannes Sambucus] (e.g. Gábor Tüskés, "Imitation and Adaptation in Late Humanist Emblematic Poetry: Zsámboky (Sambucus) and Whitney" [2001]); on Polish emblematics see Janusz Pelc, *Obraz słowo - znak: studium o emblematach w literaturze staropolskiej (1973).*

emphasized here, because – as we shall see – the important cultural-historical category, 'emblematic,' usefully bridges the two areas of understanding and thus becomes a key term in the semiotic interpretation of early modern culture.

In what follows I shall introduce the characteristic standpoints of emblem research – by now crystallized – through two, relatively recent and very clearly drafted opinions. The first is by Peter M. Daly, one of the most significant figures of international emblem studies, whose pioneering monograph, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem*, was originally published back in 1979. The author, however, completely rewrote and updated the first chapter ("The Emblem") for the second edition in 1998 which – with its definitions and literature-review – thus has become an important account of our topic.[10] The other work is by Michael Bath, whose work on English emblem books and Renaissance culture (*Speaking Pictures*, 1994) is also prefixed by an important and 'heavy weight' introduction: "Theories and Contexts." While reviewing and assessing these two contributions, I shall also mention other cornerstones of emblem studies, especially the earlier, but still important German approaches.

Daly sums up the difficulties of defining the emblem as follows: "Loosely speaking, the emblem is a form of allegorical or symbolical expression, but its relation to allegory, symbolism, metaphor, and conceit is difficult to establish. This is partly because the same terms have been discussed in their aesthetic, rhetorical, ontological, semantic, cultural, social, linguistic, and grammatical contexts."[11]

The question is further complicated by the fact that emblems do not only border between various forms of symbolic structures but also between genres and subgenres, such as the *impresas*, the *Biblia pauperum*, or the ornamented frontispieces of Renaissance books.

The historiographical summaries of Daly and Bath converge in differentiating between two main traditions of the emblem. The first may be called a moralizing-rhetorical tradition which emphasizes the individual invention and presents the reader with enigmatic structures to be elucidated. This program is usually seen as related to the Renaissance interest in hieroglyphics and the search for the lost antedeluvian language, the *lingua adamica*. Yet another characteristic feature of this orientation was the intellectual fashion of curiosities, extravaganza, mysteries, labyrinths and riddles fostered by the spirit of Mannerism.[12]

A different approach to emblem-interpretation was developed in the 1960s by the scholars of German Baroque literature, Albrecht Schöne and Dietrich Jöns.[13] It was a new feature

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[10] A former version of this chapter with a lengthy, annotated bibliography was published in Szeged in *Iconography in Cultural Studies* (cf. Daly 1996, 5-29).

[11] Daly 1998, 4. He mentions Heinrich Lausberg's handbook of rhetorics (*Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik*, München, 1966) and Philip Wheelwright's symbol theory (*The Burning Fountain*, Bloomington, 1954) as extreme examples.

[12] The studies of Karl Gielow (1915) and Ludwig Volkmann (1962 [1923]) established the connection between the Renaissance fashion of hieroglyphics and the spreading of emblems. The interest of Gustav René Hocke (*Die Welt als Labyrinth. Manier und Manie in der europäischen Kunst*, 1957) and Mario Praz (1964) in Mannerism supported this line of interpretation which was also in harmony with Heckscher and Wirth's magisterial survey and classification (1959).

[13] See Schöne, *Emblematik und Drama im Zeitalter des Barock* (1968 [1964]) és Jöns, *Das Sinnen Bild. Studien zur allegorischen Bildlichkeit bei Andreas Gryphius* (1966). These works are summarized by Daly's *Emblem*

in their views that they emphasized the role of tradition and conventions as opposed to individual invention. It should be noted, however, that strong traditionality characterized more the 17th-century religious emblem books than those of the 16th century. The ideological foundations of the traditionalist school could be found in the concept of the 'Book of Nature' developed by medieval theologians, the reading of which demanded an allegorical-typological-emblematic way of seeing. Jöns even compared the effectiveness of emblems to Biblical exegesis and defined the genre as a kind of thought-form ("Denkform") and opposed to Alciati's ideal of artistic expression ("Kunstform"). This concept of tradition-bound pictorial symbolism inspired the *Emblemata*, the magisterial motif-index of emblem pictures compiled by Arthur Henkel and Albrecht Schöne, published in 1967.

The above described two approaches were compared with and juxtaposed to modern theories of cultural semiotics by Michael Bath (1994, 2ff.). As he pointed out, the Renaissance and Baroque authors also had their opinion about the function of symbolic texts and images, and they had a perception of traditions in relation to which they formed their own judgement. One of the main questions of those contemporary theories was whether the images and signs used by mankind are natural or conventional, that is whether their meaning is determined by nature or agreed upon by the users. A distinction – according to which pictures are natural and words conventional – goes back to Plato who in his *Cratylus* examined various aspects of this hypothesis. In the dialogue Socrates reasons following his usual manner, meaning that it is not easy to discover any clear cut opinion in his statements, rather, we are introduced to a number of seemingly right then wittily refuted arguments. There are two main clusters of points discussed: whether imitation or convention results in a superior way of understanding, and whether pictures and words are similar or different in being natural and/or conventional. At one moment Cratylus suggests, "Representation by likeness, Socrates, is infinitely better than representation by any chance sign".[14] This appears a clear stand in favor of imitation, but later on Socrates proves on him that custom and convention are still needed, even if names bear a certain likeness to the things signified:

Custom and convention must be supposed to contribute to the indication of our thoughts. [...] I quite agree with you that words should as far as possible resemble things, but I fear that this dragging in of resemblance, as Hermogenes says, is a shabby thing, which has to be supplemented by the mechanical aid of convention with a view to correctness (435b-c, ed.cit. 469).

In addition to this Socrates also points out that imitative or natural names (= pictures) are no more perfect than words since, if pictures could represent perfect likeness, they would be doubles rather than signifyers and "no one would be able to determine which were the names and which were the realities" (432d). With this we are led to the other cluster of arguments: which is superior, likeness or conventional signification? This in fact is an epistemological question, asking if we can know things better by studying their conventional names or by examining the things themselves. The obvious answer should be in favor of the direct study of things if one

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Theory (1979) and in Fabiny's article (1984).

[14] Cratylus 434a, as translated by Benjamin Jowett; quoted from Hamilton, Cairns ed. 1963, 468.

could be sure that reality is conveyed faithfully and objectively by the human sensation. But this is seriously questioned by modern theory, and the post-structuralists receive important backing from Socrates: "How real existence is to be studied or discovered is, I suspect, beyond you and me" (439b).

A few passages later he reinstates his faith in the existence of absolute beauty and absolute good and also claims that these cannot be in the state of changing, they must be eternal. This is a well-known principle of Platonism, however, Socrates' awareness of a skeptical standpoint unsettlingly lingers on even in the closing sentences of the dialogue:

Whether there is this eternal nature in things, or whether the truth is what Heraclitus and his followers and many others say, is a question hard to determine. [...] This may be true, Cratylus, but is also very likely to be untrue, and therefore I would not have you be too easily persuaded of it (440c-d).

The above dilemma has been present and much discussed in European philosophical thinking ever since, and emblems by their very existence contributed to the debate. In these tripartite structures one could come across completely symbolic as well as very naturalistic images in combination with completely conventional texts, thus embracing the full semiotic scale outlined in *Cratylus*. Emblem theory, quite understandably, has spent a lot of arguments on the origin and nature of pictures and names.

In contrast to the Heckscher–Schöne debate we today see the contemporary opinions not so much antagonizing the two approaches to emblems – rhetorical invention as opposed to natural imitation –, rather synthesizing them in the footsteps of Neoplatonic syncretism. It is true, that the rhetorical tradition creating moralizing emblems presupposed some kind of 'natural likeness' behind the individual invention, just as was taken for granted in the case of hieroglyphs. On the other hand, the enigma constituted in the web of *motto (inscriptio) – pictura – subscriptio* also relied on cultural tradition, using the exempla, topoi and figures of literature and the visual arts.

The other, religious-explanatory model programmatically banked on tradition, such as the typological and allegorical symbolism of Biblical exegesis, however, their authors were aware of the notion that the'Book of Nature,' no matter how symbolically instructive its elements were, originally consisted of natural images, the eternal, divinely created structures of the Cosmos which was thought to be independent of any human convention or agreement.[15]

The novelty in Michael Bath's 1994 interpretation is that he broke away from the earlier binary typology of emblem theories, instead he suggested to look at the emblem genre in a

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[15] Modern emblem studies rely mostly on the following contemporary theoretical works when assessing the conceptual framework of the emblematic way of seeing: Alciati *De verborum significatione* (1530), Thomas Blount *The Art of Making Devises* (1646), Achille Bocchio *Symbolicarum quaestionum de universo genere* (1555), Jacobus Boschius *Symbolographia* (1702), Joachim Camerarius, *Symbola et Emblemata* (1595), Abraham Fraunce, *Insignium, armorum, emblematum, hieroglyphicorum et symbolorum . . . explicatio* (1588), Christophoro Giarda, *Icones symbolicae* (1626), Paolo Giovio, *Dialogo dell' imprese militari et amorose* (1555), Horapollo, *Hieroglyphica* (1517), Jacob Masen, *Speculum imaginum veritatis occultae, exhibens symbola, emblemata, hieroglyphica, aenigmata* (1650), Claude Paradin, *Devises heroiques* (1551), Filippo Picinello *Mundus symbolicus in emblematum universitate formatus* (1681), Johannes Sambucus *Emblemata* (1564), and the writings of Jacobus Typotius (*Symbola divina et humana*, 1601, *De hierographia*, 1618). See Manning, "Renaissance and Baroque Symbol Theory: Some Introductory Questions and Problems" (1999).

unified conceptual framework. He started where Schöne concluded his observations, speaking about the "facticity" of emblems. By this the German scholar meant that on the emblem pictures one can see a lot of common, everyday like items, objects, creatures which seem to authenticate the images with their realism. In the process of complex representation, then, these pictures gain symbolic significance. Schöne also noted, that these 'facts' are often imaginary beings (monsters, fairytale sceneries, superstitious theories) which became 'realistic' only by the force of tradition and shared beliefs.[16]Schöne called these "potential facticity," and Bath illustrates the phenomenon by the following example: many 16th-century emblems referred to the stag as the symbol of swiftness, claiming, that the animal is the quickest after having *eatena viper*, because then it rushes to the creek or river to dissolve the poison. This belief dating from the time of the Church Fathers lost its credibility by the time of the Renaissance, however, the consensus between author and audience about the swiftness of the animal preserved the outdated explanation as a topos in symbolic expressions (Bath 1994, 4-5).

According to Bath, these 'potential facticities' should be explained by the help of the theory of *topoi* and for greater clarity he adopts the term *vraisemblable* of Gérard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov. This refers not only to the 'realistic' elements found on emblem pictures, but also to such likeness which is embedded in and authenticated by tradition. Such discourse will not need validation by reason or experience, since the power of tradition creates a *vraisemblable*, as if it was directly following from the nature of the universe. It is due to the stereotypical knowledge sanctified by tradition that a symbolic representation becomes easily comprehensible.[17]

When modern emblem theory analyzes the interaction between topoi and naturalistic *vraisemblable* in the emblems, the examination connects to key questions of structuralist and post-structuralist semiotics. On the one hand emblems, bordering between images and text with a condensed and multi-layered communication potential, have become a test-case of semiotics and literary theory.[18] Furthermore, the semiotic study of 'natural images,' i.e. *hypoicons*[19] versus conventional-topical ways of seeing can directly be utilized in emblem research, too. Michael Bath and Pater Daly would agree in that the individual, rhetorical invention and the topical conventionality cannot be separated in emblems: "The problem with the concept of arbitrary signs is, precisely, that the conventional is, by definition, the same as the arbitrary" (Bath 1994, 7). In this respect theories of semiotic codes and semiotic difference could provide further help, but this time I do not intend to investigate this direction. Let us have a look at, instead, the developments of the past few decades in emblem research.

1.2 The Contemporary Boom of Emblem Research

As I have already indicated, the first vogue of emblem research lasted from the late 1940s till about the 1970s. This period – after the pioneering 19th-century work of Henry Green (1866, 1870) – was marked by Mario Praz, WilliamHeckscher, Arthur Henkel, Albrecht Schöne and

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[16] Schöne's theory (1968) is summarized by Daly 1979, 40.

[17] Bath here also cites Culler's *Structuralist Poetics* (1975, 140).

[18] See Winfried Nöth's *Handbook of Semiotics* (1995), 31,115, 396.

[19] On hypoicons see Eco, *Kant and the Platypus* (1999), 420-89; and Nöth 1995, 122-3.

Dietrich Jöns to which studies of 'applied emblematics' by Rosemary Freeman (on English emblem books, 1948), Robert J. Clements (on the relationship between humanist ideology and emblems, 1960), Barbara Lewalski (on Protestant poetics, 1979) and other should be added.[20]

A new phase in emblem research started in around 1980. It was Peter Daly and Bernhard Scholz who – independently from each other – gave an emphasized theoretical bias to these studies.[21] As if carrying on the programof earlier German research (e.g. the Henkel–Schöne *Emblemata*), Daly also started working on the extensive mapping of emblem literature, initiating such formidable projects as the "Union Catalogue of Emblem Books" (1988) or the critical edition of emblem books in the series *Index Emblematicus*.[22]The purpose of this large scale archival and publication activity was to make emblem book accessible to scholars who could thus start engaging in the pertinent work of modern (re)interpretation of the emblems, analyzing the role this genre played in early modern European culture.

Daly's theoretical research has been concentrating in two areas: 1/ the study of emblems proper and 2/ the influence of emblems on Renaissance literature. As for the first area, he pinpointed the most important tasks as follows:

1. What are the content and origin of the *pictura*; what is its relation to reality, if any?
2. What are the content, origin and purpose of the *inscriptio* and *subscriptio*?
3. What functional relationship exists between *pictura* and *scriptura*, i.e., between thing (pictured) and meaning (expressed in words)? How is the synthesis effected?
4. What is the overriding purpose of the emblem book? (1998, 7-8)[23]

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[20] Some more studies in 'applied emblematics' (not included in the list of references at the end of this paper): John Doebler, *Shakespeare's Speaking Pictures* (Albuquerque: New Mexico University Press, 1974); Robert B. Heilmann, *This Great Stage. Images and Structure in King Lear* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1948); Holger Homann, *Studien zur Emblematik des 16. Jahrhunderts: Sebastian Brandt, Andrea Alciati, Johannes Sambucus, Mathias Holzwart, Nicolaus Taurellus* (Utrecht: Dekker & Gumbert, 1971); Gottfried Kirchner, *Fortuna in Dichtung und Emblematik des Barock: Tradition und Bedeutungswander eines Motivs* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1970); Dieter Mehl, "Emblematik in englischen Drama der Shakespearezeit," *Anglia*87(1969):6-46;John M. Steadman,"Dalila,the Ulysses Myth, and the Renaissance Allegorical Tradition," *Modern Language Review* 57 (1962): 560-5; Steadman, "Falstaff as Acteon: A Dramatic Emblem," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 14 (1963): 230-44; Michael Schilling, *Imagines mundi: metaphorische Darstellung der Welt in der Emblematik* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1979); etc.

[21] Cf. Daly, *Emblem Theory* (1979); Scholz, "Emblematisches Abbilden als Notation" (1984) and "Das Emblem als Textsorte und als Genre" (1989).

[22] The so far the following volumes have been published in the *Index Emblematicus* series: *Andreas Alciatus* (see Alciati 1985); *The English Emblem Tradition* (Daly ed. 1988). These editions are noted for their computer-generated picture, theme, motif, and motto indices. Furthermore, Daly's work is hallmarked by the periodical *Emblematica*, the monograph-series *AMS Studies in the Emblem*, and the series of annotated bibliographies *Corpus Librorum Emblematum*. Since the late 1980s the *International Society for the Study of Emblems* organizes its regular conferences, the selected essays of which have been also published in Brill's series, *Symbola & Emblemata*, established by Bernhard Scholz. One should also mention the series *Glasgow Studies in the Emblem*, established and edited by Alison Adams.

[23] Here I am relying on the newly written first chapter of his book, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem* (1998). He also extensively wrote about the newest trends and challenges of emblem research in his essay, "Where Are We Going in Studies of Iconography and Emblematics?" This appeared in a less readily available publication of the University of Szeged (1996).

As for the relationship between literature and emblems, Daly established a reliable typology in his groundbreaking study (1998 [1979]) and devoted a few important articles specifically to the emblematic structures of Shakespearean drama and Elizabethan theater.[24]

The other – intensive and analytical – trend of most recent emblem research can be associated with the work of Bernhard Scholz, Daniel Russell and Michael Bath. All of them have been influenced by semiotics and the latter two have also opened their interest in the direction of cultural studies. This trend approaches emblems and the emblematic way of seeing in a wider context of sign-systems as well as general questions of communication and cultural representation. One should also mention in association with this line of research Dieter Sulzer's posthumously published monograph: *Traktate zur Emblematik. Studien zur einer Geschichte der Emblemtheorien* (1992).

To look at once again the entirety of modern emblem research, we can conclude that some scholars have been concentrating on the analysis and interpretation of emblems as a self-contained literary/artistic genre of the Renaissance and Baroque periods, others have rather emphasized the importance of emblems as a way of seeing, characteristic for the early modern period. In the next section I shall look at the latter approach, starting to review those medieval and Renaissance forms of cultural representations which prepared and catalyzed the way for the 'full-blown emblematic' expression.

2 EMBLEMATIC

2.1 'Emblematic Cultural Representations'

Let us define once again emblems in such a way that it allows deducing the concept of the 'emblematic way of seeing,' too. The emblem is a tripartite genre that organically synthesizes picture and words with the purpose of mixing naturalistic pictorial representation (hypoicons, *vraisemblable*), conventional symbols, topoi, rhetorical modules and other invented or traditional elements, shared and accepted by an interpretive community. The purpose of the above described presentation is to artistically please as well as to instruct, bringing a moral, religious, cosmic or philosophical truth to light sometimes by means of developing a riddle or enigma. The point of the emblematic way of seeing is the programmatic synthesis of the verbal

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[24] See Daly, "Shakespeare and the Emblem" (1984) and "Teaching Shakespeare and the Emblem" (1993). Following Daly's footsteps a lot of studies have been recently devoted to the relationship between emblems and other forms of cultural representation, a few publications of the *AMS Studies in the Emblem*: Alan R. Young, *The English Tournament Imprese* (1988), Wendy R. Katz, The Emblems of Margaret Gatty. *A Study of Allegory in Nineteenth-Century Children's Literature* (1992), Mason Tung, *Two Concordances to Ripa's Iconologia* (1992), William Heckscher, Agnes B. Sherman, *Emblematic Variants. Literary Echoes of Alciati's Term 'Emblema'* (1992), etc. – see the full bibliographical details in Daly 1996, Note 2. From the series, *Glasgow Studies of the Emblem* I would like to draw attention to volumes 8 and 9 (Alison Adams, Stanton J. Linden ed., *Emblems and Alchemy*, 1998; Amy Wygant ed., *New Directions in Emblem Studies*, 1999). See also some volumes in Brill's *Symbola & Emblemata* series: Alison Adams ed., *The Emblem in Renaissance and Baroque Europe* (1992); György E. Szőnyi ed., *Iconography East & West* (1996); Urszula Szulakowska, *The Alchemy of Light* (2000), etc. One should also mention a few important reference books and motif-indices, following the achievement of Henkel–Schöne: Diehl, *Index of Icons in English Emblem Books, 1500-1700* (1986) and De Bustamente, *Instrumentum Emblematicum* (1992).

and the visual, as well as the naturalistic and the conventional.[25]

The 'invention' of this way of seeing was not a product of the Renaissance, rather the previous epoch, the Middle Ages and its roots reach back as far as the Classical Antiquity. According to Peter Daly (1998, 9-42) the following classical and medieval genres can be identified as forerunners of the Renaissance emblems:

The HIEROGLYPHS. If we want to dig the deepest in the past of the emblematic way of seeing, we reach as far as the hieroglyphs of Egypt. As is known, the key to Egyptian writing had been lost already in the Classical Age and only in the 19th century could the French Champollion decipher it. This fact did not prevent the humanists of the Renaissance from attaching a variety of symbol theories to the mysterious picture-language the remains of which were readily available on obelisks and other items brought to Europe.[26] The nature of speculations on hieroglyphs is clearly demonstrated by the opinion of Leon Battista Alberti, the Italian architect:

The Egyptians employed symbols in the following manner: they carved an eye, by which they understood God; a vulture for Nature; a bee for a King; a circle for Time; an ox for Peace, and the like. And their reason for expressing their sense by these symbols was, that words were understood only by the respective nations that talked the language, and therefore inscriptions in common characters must in a short time be lost: as it has actually happened to our Etruscan characters. [. . .] The Egyptians supposed, by symbols, they thought must always be understood by learned men of all nations.[27]

Alberti's argumentation appeals to common sense (pictures are easier to understand by viewers belonging to different ages and civilizations than words expressed in a given tongue), his opinion is nevertheless akin with those speculations that attributed a mystical and hidden religious meaning to those signs. For such views conventional writing (as well as speech, i.e. any human language) was uncertain in comparison with a system built on 'natural' images. This way of thinking can be paralleled with those Renaissance beliefs according to which Adam in Paradise also received such a natural, unambiguous language from his Creator.[28]

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[25] The relationship of the two has been identified by Ernst Gombrich as Aristotelian 'didaxis' and Platonic 'revelation.' See Gombrich, "'Icones Symbolicae': Philosophies of Symbolism and Their Bearing on Art". In Gombrich 1978, 123-99.

[26] Horapollo's *Hieroglyphica*, a 3rd-century A.D. speculation on Egyptian symbols was discovered in 1419, and its Latin translation appeared in 1515. The Renaissance fascination with hieroglyphics is shown by Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499), Piero Valeriano's *Hieroglyphica* (1556), and John Dee's mystical treatise, *Monas hieroglyphica* (1564). On the early modern reception of hieroglyphs see Dieckmann, *Hieroglyphics. The History of a Literary Symbol* (1970); Giehlow, *Die Hieroglyphenkunde des Humanismus in der Allegorie der Renaissance* (1915); Volkmann *Bilderschriften der Renaissance, Hieroglyphik und Emblematik in ihren Beziehungen und Fortwirkungen* (1962); and Wittkover, *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols* (1977), 113-28. See also Erik Iversen's monograph: *The Myth of Egypt and Its Hieroglyphics in European Tradition* (Kopenhagen, 1961) and Daniel Russell's "Emblems and Hieroglyphics: Some Observations on the Beginnings and Nature of Emblematic Forms" (1988).

[27] *De architectura. Book VIII, chapter 4. After Wittkower quoted by Daly 1998, 22.*

[28] On the *lingua adamica* see Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language* (1995), 7-10; Szönyi, "The Language of the Other" (2002) and Alison Coudert's collection of essays, *The Language of Adam / Die Sprache*

The Renaissance enthusiasm for hieroglyphs erupted in 1419 when a priest from Florence managed to get hold of Horapollo's manuscript which contained reproductions of Egyptian hieroglyphs together with interpretive comments by the Greek author. Marsilio Ficino and his neoplatonist circle showed great interest toward this work, because they imagined that the sacred ideograms expressed direct divine thruth, a kind of forerunner of Christian theology.

According to Ludwig Volkman (1962) the 'invention' of emblems derived from the ambition of some humanists to create the modern equivalents of hieroglyphs. The early emblem writers all referred to the Egyptian writing as well as related mystical lore, such as the hermetic texts or Pythagorean number symbolism.[29] In one of the recent studies on the relationship between hieroglyphs and emblems, Daniel Russell has concluded that although Egyptian writing has obviously exercised a strong influence on Renaissance emblems, interestingly, the hieroglyphic signs themselves hardly ever became the subjects of emblem pictures.

Another classical genre representing the emblematic way of seeing was GREEK EPIGRAMS. Already Mario Praz noticed, that the Greeks inserted short texts on vases, tombs, or memorial columns on which the relationship between pictures and words was that of emblematic. In this group one could also classify those Antique coins or medals which also combined images with some inscription.

While hieroglyphs belonged to the theory of the emblematic way of seeing, the epigrams and medals inspired the forging of the technique and structure. Finally, the subject matter (i.e. the *lexica*) of symbolic expression came mostly from classical mythology. This vocabulary – together with the images and stories of Judeo-Christian mythology – was not only used in emblems, but likewise in other didactic and allegorizing genres, such as legends, dream fables, parables and the like.[30] One of the most popular types of allegory in the Middle Ages was the comparison between life and wandering, or pilgrimage. In fact this topos had also been invented in Classical Antiquity together with the analogy between the ages of man and the ages of the world (usually seven in number). The prototype and most famous Greek dialogue to discuss this theme was the *Table of Cebes* (*Tabula Cebetis*) which consists of an ekphrastic description of a picture showing the phases of human life as concentric circles. The narrator, as if a guide, gives the meticulous interpretation of an allegoric picture to be found in the temple of Saturn with such details, that several Renaissance artists attempted at its visual reconstruction. Thus one finds a rather simple visualization on Gilles Corozot's French

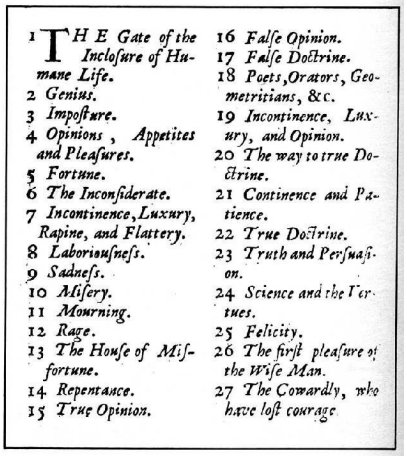
1 THE Gate of the Incloſure of Humane Life.
2 Genius.
3 Impoſture.
4 Opinions, Appetites and Pleaſures.
5 Fortune.
6 The Inconſiderate.
7 Incontinence, Luxury, Rapine, and Flattery.
8 Laboriouſneſs.
9 Sadneſs.
10 Miſery.
11 Mourning.
12 Rage.
13 The Houſe of Miſfortune.
14 Repentance.
15 True Opinion.
16 Falſe Opinion.
17 Falſe Doctrine.
18 Poets, Orators, Geometritians, &c.
19 Incontinence, Luxury, and Opinion.
20 The way to true Doctrine.
21 Continence and Patience.
22 True Doctrine.
23 Truth and Perſuaſion.
24 Science and the Vertues.
25 Felicity.
26 The firſt pleaſure of the Wiſe Man.
27 The Cowardly, who have loſt courage.

Figure 2

Adams (1999).

[29] See for example the opinion of the Hungarian emblem writer, Johannes Sambucus in his *Emblemata* (Antwerpen, 1564), 3-5. Modern, facsimile edition Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982 (ed. by August Buck and Béla Varjas). The relevant passages are also quoted by Praz 1964, 34-5.

[30] On the function of classical and Judeo-Christian mythology in the iconography of allegoric didaxis see Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (1993 [1955]); Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* (1972); Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (1968); Wittkower, *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols* (1977), etc.

translation in 1543. Later the English emblematist, George Whither put his own "Tabula Cebetis" on the title page of his *Collection of Emblemes* (London, 1635), then N. J. Visscher engraved a much more elaborate visual presentation in 1640 and the Flemish Jesuit, Antoine Socquet, developed a whole emblem book – *Via vitae aeternae* (1620) – on the themes of the Greek allegory. In 1670 another Englishman, John Davies designed a flamboyant illustration entitled *The Embleme of Humane Life* to which he also added a key, explaining the various stages of life displayed on the picture (see FIGURES 2 and 3).[31]

Figure 3

Let us now have a look at the medieval development of the emblematic way of seeing. It was again Mario Praz who called attention to the "emblematic mentality" of medieval culture (1964, 12, 24), i.e. the conventional symbolism to be found in bestiaries, lapidaries and other collections of 'scientific' or moralizing commonplaces. The complete investigation of MEDIEVAL NATURE SYMBOLISM was accomplished by Albrecht Schöne and Dietrich Jöns, who, conversely, followed the suggestions of Friedrich Ohly (1959) concerning the medieval intellectual meaning of certain words. As Tibor Fabiny (1998a, 26-8) has also emphasized, this medieval symbolism developed in relation to biblical exegesis and TYPOLOGICAL THINKING. The latter – having been worked out by the Church Fathers – approached the world along the binary oppositions of type and antitype, shadow world and reality, prophecy and fulfillment. Among others, Saint Augustine pointed out that God endowed the things of creation with rich emblematic significance: persons, objects and events carried secondary meanings by which those as if foreshadowed things to come.

This mentality was summarized with graphic exactness in the famous poem of Alanus ab Insulis:

Omnis mundi creatura
Quasi liber et pictura
Nobis est et speculum;
Nostri status, nostrae sortis
Fidele signaculum.

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[31] Heninger 1977, 180-2; see also Bath 1994, 113-5; Daly 1998, 16; Fabiny 1984, 293-307; Schleier, *Tabula Cebetis: Studien zur Rezepzion einer antiken Bildbeschreibung* (1973); and Sandra Sider's edition, *Cebes' Tablet: Facsimiles of the Greek Text, and of Selected Translations* (1979).

Nostrum statum pingit rosa,
Nostri status decens glosa,
Nostrae vitae lectio.

[All creatures of the world, the books and the pictures are also mirrors for us which faithfully signify our state and our end. Our state is depicted by the rose a nice gloss, the lecture of our life.][32]

In the 11th century Hugo of Saint Victor added another powerful metaphor to the exegetical understanding of the universe. As he wrote, the world was nothing else, but a book written by the hand of God.[33] The idea of the *signatura rerum*, i.e. that the things of the world should be read as God's signs, was not only attractive for the people of the Middle Ages but also for those of the Renaissance and the Baroque periods and only 18th-century rationalism started undermining this thought.[34] Both in typological symbolism and in emblematic expressions we find an ambition to reveal some higher truth, moral teaching or universal revelation. It was especially the *sensus tropologicus*, i.e. the ethical didaxis which fertilized the imagination of the emblem writers.[35]

Emblematic symbolism followed the medieval tradition in one more respect: while reading the 'Book of Nature,' medieval thinkers came to the conclusion that every element of the world has multiple meanings. The same thing can once represent something good and positive at another time something bad, too. This was what the emblem writers referred to as the image or symbol *in bonam partem* and *in malam partem*. Both Christian and pagan mythology provided enough examples for this double symbolism, enough to think of the snake, which as the Tempter of the first humans represented evil; on the other hand one could also read in the Gospel, "Be ye therefore wise as serpents..." (Mt 10, 16), allowing a tradition of positive interpretation of the same animal. Following this sense Cesare Ripa created the iconography of *Prudenza*, who holds a snake in her hand because it defends its head with the rings of its body, thus prudently resisting attacks. The same way Prudence withholds the strokes of volatile Fortune(see FIGURE 4). This kind of dichotomy very often appears in emblem books, too. There is the hare, for example, what in Camerarius' collection represents vigilance, while in the emblem book of La Perriere stands for bad consciousness.[36]

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[32] Alanus' poem is quoted and commented by Daly 1998, 39, 48.

[33] See Gabriel Josipovici, *The World and the Book* (1971), passim.

[34] One of the most grandious explanations of the theory of *signatura rerum* can be found in Jacob Boehme's treatise with the same title (a richly illustrated edition was published in Amsterdam, 1682). The cultural history of the *signatura rerum* from Paracelsus to Leibniz can be found in Bianchi's *Signatura rerum: segni, magia e cognoscenza da Paracelso a Leibniz* (1987); to Boehme's philosophy and iconography Geissmar, *Das Auge Gottes. Bilder zu Jakob Böhme* (1993). Michel Foucalt in his *The Order of Things* (1994) gave a poststructuralist explanation.

[35] Cf. Schöne (1968, 47-8), Daly (1979, 52 and 1998, 48) and Fabiny 1998, 27.

[36] Daly 1984, 135-6 and 1998, 48-51, also Fabiny 1998, 27. On the semiotics of the seemingly limitless interpretation of ambiguous symbols see Eco 1990, 8-22.

We can safely say that typological and exegetical symbolism penetrated every aspect of medieval life. Those who did or could not read the works of the Church Fathers and other theologians, still heard about this lore of knowledge when listening to the Sunday preaching, and, even more importantly, everybody was exposed to this tradition in the many visual representations or even everyday situations that were charged with symbolic significance.[37]

Figure 4

The most important scenery was, without doubt, the church, where not only altar-pieces and frescoes conveyed 'sensus tropologicus,' but the tombs, ornaments, church flags, the embroidered vestment of the priests, not to mention the whole coreography of the rituals and ceremonies. This symbolic Christian iconography prevailed in the secular sphere, too,[38] and the people could encounter it among the decorations of town or guild halls, the gables of houses, on tapesteries hunging on walls of castles of burgher residences, on the insignia of royal entries or professional gatherings, on dresses, on jewels, on carnival masks and on children's toys. Let us look at a few examples that demonstrate the visual profusion of this world full of emblems, symbols and allegories.

FIGURE 5 shows one of the most beautiful examples of European tomb-sculpture which synthesizes Christian and secular-moral-political symbolism in an intricate, nevertheless characteristic way. The memorial of Francis II, Prince of Brittany and his wife, Margaret was made by Michel Colombe between 1502 and 1507 and is to be found in the Peter and Paul cathedral of Nantes. The many figured composition has in its center the effigies of the ruling couple who are surrounded by emblematic characters: angels support their heads to ease their way to heaven; the lion lying at the feel of Francis represents strength; the dog placed at the feet

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[37] A classic study is *The Waning of the Middle Ages* by Johann Huizinga, especially the following chapters: "The Vision of Death," "Religious Thought Crystallizing in Images," "Religious Sensitivity and Religious Imagination."

[38] On applied Christian symbolism see Cornelia Kemp, *Angewandte Emblematik in süddeutschen Barockkirchen* (München: Dt. Kunstverlag, 1981) and Dietmar Peil, *Zur "angewandte Emblematik" in protestantischen Erbauungsbüchern* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1978); on the secularization of Christian symbolism cf. Réau, "Définition et applications de l'iconographie" (1955), 1-12; On the emblematic aspects of everyday visuality see below.

of Margaret faithfulness. At the four corners of the tomb there are monumental figures of the four cardinal virtues: *Fortitudo* (an armored character chasing a dragon out of a tower) and *Iustitia* (a figure with crown and sword) belong to Francis, while *Prudentia* and *Temperantia* to Margaret. The iconography of Prudence is particularly interesting: a double-faced figure, a young girl looking forward and an old man looking back to the past. The base of the monument

Figure 5

comprises of 16 smaller statues of saints who are the patrons of the ruler and his wife. Even on a lower level there are representations of mourning subjects.

Figure 5

FIGURE 6 recalls the naturalism and humor which almost always complemented religious symbolism in the Middle Ages. The picture shows a *misericord*, the back side of one of those folding supporting chairs which were to discretely ease the periods of long kneeling for the priests. This rarely visible side of the seats were usually decorated by humorous-allegorical scenes (the fable of the fox preaching to

Figure 6

the geese), or rustic domestic episodes, such as the angry wife beating her late coming, drunk husband. One of the most exquisite sets of *misericords* can be found in Beverley Minster, York.

The next illustration shows the 16th century gate of a rich burgher-house from Northern Germany, richly decorated with Biblical and mythological motifs (FIGURE 7).

Figure 7

Special applications of the Biblical-exegetical tradition were the various picture-series, such as the illustrated books called *Biblia pauperum*, or the *dance of death* cycles.[39] The speciality of the former was, that it illustrated typological symbolism in such a way that Old Testament and New Testament scenes were juxtaposed on one page, emphasizing the typological connections between the two Biblical layers. FIGURE 8 establishes a parallel between Jonah's escape from the whale and the resurrection of Christ.

Another major semiotic system of the Middle Ages – synthesizing pictures and words – was HERALDRY. The purpose of this code has been to connect the individual to a family or a (professional/national) group on the basis of clearly identifiable symbolic pictures and mottoes. Heraldry goes back to medieval chivalry and it had an important role in military history as well, since made possible to differentiate among the participants of a battle who wore their insignia on their clothing and flags.[40] As of the later Middle Ages, heraldry went through some major changes: on the one hand with the coats of arms of the nobility it developed a complicated and ornate art, on the other hand it has become widely used in most spheres of everyday life. Examples can be given from the area of administration (coats of arms of

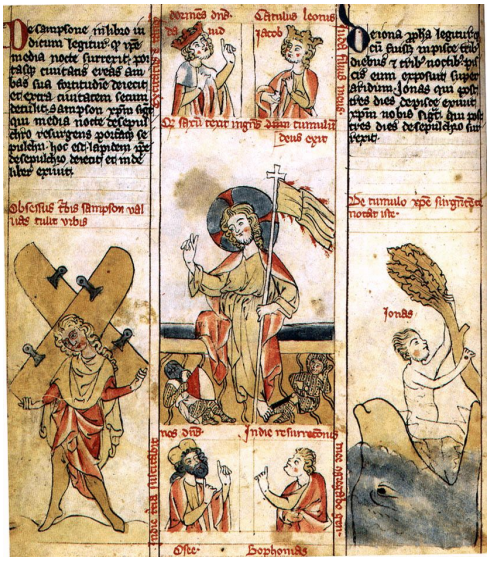

Figure 8

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[39] On the "Biblia pauperum" see H. Cornell, *Biblia pauperum* (Stockholm: Thule-Tryck, 1925); Schmidt, *Die Armenbibeln des XVI. Jahrhunderts* (1959); and G. Scmidt, A. Weckwerth, "Biblia pauperum," in E. Kirschbaum ed., *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*(Rom–Freiburg–Basel–Wien: Herder), 293-8. On the *dance of death* see John Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse: Confronting Famine, War, Plague, and Death in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2001); Stephan Cossacchi, *Makabertanz. Der Totentanz in Kunst, Poesie, und Brauchtum des Mittelalters* (Meisenheim: Hain, 1965); and Hellmut Rosenfeld, *Der mittelalterliche Totentanz. Entstehung, Entwicklung, Bedeutung* (Köln: Böhlau, 1974). The European approach to death has been analysed mostly by French scholars: Philippe Aries, *L'homme devant la mort* (Paris: Edition de Seuil, 1977); Alberto Tenenti, *La vie et la mort a travers l'art du Xve siččle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1952); Tenenti, *Sens de la mort et amour de la vie. Renaissance en Italie et en France* (Paris: Serge Fleury, 1983); Gaby et Michel Vovelle, *Vision de la mort et de l'au-delá en Provance* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1970); Michel Vovelle, *Mourir autrefois. Attitudes collectives devant la mort aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siččles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974).

[40] On the basics of heraldry see Vaclav Vok Filip, *Einführung in die Heraldik* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2000); Ottfried Neubecker, *Heraldik: Wappen. Ihr Ursprung, Sinn und Wert* (Frankfurt/M: Krüger, 1977); Gert Oswald, *Lexikon der Heraldik* (Mannheim: Bibliogr. Institute, 1984); Thomas Woodcock, *The Oxford Guide to Heraldry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1990), etc.

towns and countries) to various intellectual and professional bodies (the signs of guilds, printers, freemasons, inns, boy scouts, etc.). On FIGURE 9 one can see the emblematic coat of arms of the Percy family on their tomb in Beverley Minster, Yorkshire; FIGURE 10 shows Shakespeare's stylized coat of arms on the wall of the Shakespeare Center in Stratford-upon-Avon; FIGURE 11 is a pub-sign from contemporary Cambridge.

Figure 9

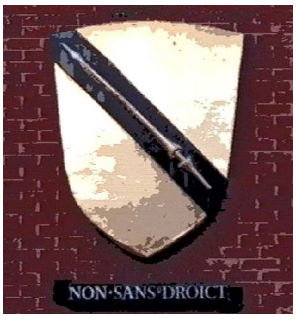

Figure 10

Figure 11

The symbolic elements of heraldic language often appear together with naturalistic depiction, as on many early modern aristocratic portraits (FIGURE 12).

Figure 12

Several scholars have called attention to the relationship between heraldry and emblems. It is interesting, however, that important studies have only been devoted to the heraldic motifs

in Shakespeare's plays.[41] As Daly emphasizes, this relationship must have been bidirectional: in the beginnings heraldry catalyzed the birth of emblems while later the art of coat of arms started using more and more emblematic elements. The connecting link between the two were the Italian bipartite *imprese*. The fashion of creating complicated coats of arms equipped with mottos started just about the time of the appearance of the first emblem books. According to contemporary theoreticians the main function of impresas was – similarly to the emblems – teaching and providing intellectual delight.[42]

2.2 The Philosophy and Semiotics of the Emblematic

The philosophy of the emblematic expression can be best understood if we turn to those early modern theological writers who at the same time were interested in questions of rhetorics, too. These authors looked at emblematics as a hermeneutical tool to facilitate the interpretation of the world as well as God. In this respect it is very instructive to remember the opinion of Christophoro Giarda who was discovered by E. H. Gombrich in his"Icones symbolicae" (1948). Giarda's work was written in 1626 and consists of the interpretation of16 frescoes which were inaugurated at that time decorating the reading room of a Jesuit college. In a preface Giarda philosophized on the use and functioning of symbolic images,[43] suggesting that these allegoric personifications of the liberal arts are not simply words translated into picture language, rather catalyzers, thanks to which the soul, imprisoned in the dark cave of the body, can catch sight of the true nature of Virtues and Arts.

From Giarda's speculations Gombrich drew the conclusion that the Jesuit professor was convinced that these personifications were in fact real materializations of the Platonic ideas. Since this cannot be proved – only that Giarda interpreted them as such– Gombrich emphasized the importance of the pragmatics of images. According to this approach, the important thing is not the way of existence of the image, rather its way of being used by the interpreting community. He also stressed that meaning is not a psychological category (in this case its reconstruction would indeed be impossible) but a construct based on social agreement and conventionality – just as in the case of other sign systems, too.

Another 17th-century opinion about the revelative power of images was that of Juan Eusebio Niremberg, who in his *Oculta filosofia* (1633) – imagining the world as an extremely complicated labyrinthine poem written in the praise of God – wrote as follows:

Plotinus called the world the poetry of God. I add, that this Poem is like a labyrinth, which is

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[41] Daly 1989, 32-8; Heckscher, Wirth 1959, col. 133ff. On Shakespeare: William L. Goldsworthy, *Shakespeare's Heraldic Emblems: Their Origin and Meaning* (London: Witherby, 1928); C. Wilfred Scott Giles, *Shakespeare's Heraldry* (London: Dent, 1950); Alan R. Young, "A Note on the Tournament Impresas in *Pericles*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36 (1985): 453-6.

[42] On *impresas* see Daly 1998, 27-30; Heckscher, Wirth 1959, 98ff.; Praz 1949; 1964, Chapter 2; Sulzer 1992, 79-138. The most important theoretician of impresas was Paolo Giovio, whose treatise appeared in English in the translation of Samuel Daniel (1585). The critical edition of this work was published by Peter Daly: *The Worthy Tract of Paulus Jovius*, in Daly ed. 1988, 29-66. The newest monographical assessment of Giovio and the impresa has been published in *Emblematica*: Dorigen Caldwell, "Studies in Sixteenth-Century Italian *Imprese*," 11 (2001): 3-257.

[43] See Gombrich 1978, 192-9.

read in every direction, and gives intimation of, and points to, its Author. Among the poetical devices of antiquity were celebrated Theocritus' flute, the egg, wings and hatchet of Simias of Rhodes. But above all the Panegyric which the Poet Porphyrius addressed to the Emperor Constantine is most cunning and incomparable, and was celebrated by St. Jerome, Fulgentius and Bede. [. . .] All this Panegyric consists of seventeen most artfully contrived labyrinths, where one verse joins and is knitted together with another in different manners, and the praises of Caesar are celebrated in all parts, by the beginnings, the middles and the ends of the lines, and crosswise, from the first letter of the first line to the last letter of the last line. And then, by combining crosswise the remaining letters of the lines between the first and the last, etc., so as to form a thousand other sentiments in the praise of Caesar. So do I imagine the world to be a Panegyric of God.[44]

Studying the theories of the contemporary emblem writers and rhetoricians, of course, reveals much more mundane and less metaphysical purposes and explanations, too. It was the Aristotelian school of poetics which – as opposed to the more mystical neoplatonic orientation – emphasized the importance of moral teaching and elevating entertainment through the various forms of riddle-like emblematic constructions.

Speaking about the theory of symbols in word-image relations, one cannot neglect working parallel with early modern notions and modern semiotic and cultural historical approaches. A good example of this approach is John Mannng's introduction to the collection of essays, *Aspects of Renaissance and Baroque Symbol Theory* (1999, xi ff. and *passim*). Here Manning suggests three pragmatical points that can be helpful in updating the theories of emblem research: 1/ paying attention to terminology and cultural specificity; 2/ differentiating between *perceiving* as a physical-biological process and *seeing / believing* as socially conditioned and constructed cognition; 3/ the recognition of the authority of signs.

From the late 15th and early 16th century onward several new ways of symbolic expression came to life, together with old forms rediscovered or reinvented. The products of this way of seeing testify that cultural representation using allegoric and emblematic images happened according to a systematic program rooted in social practice as well as in world picture. This program was worked out and exercised by humanists, courtiers, herolds, philologists, alchemists, rhetoricians, esoteric philosophers, poets, Jesuit educators and the like, throughout the wide spectrum of early modern intellectuals. They did not only practiced symbolic expression, but, parallel with it also produced a theoretical discourse, first mostly in Latin then in an increasing percentage in the European vernaculars.[45]

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[44] Quoted by Praz 1964, 19-20. (Emphasis is mine, GYESZ.)

[45] The volume, *Aspects of Renaissance and Baroque Symbol Theory* (Peter Daly and John Manning ed., 1999) gives a useful bibliography of works important for the reconstructing of eaarly modern symboltheory. Some representative works from the list: Alciati *De verborum significatione* (1530), Johann Heinrich Alsted *Encyclopaedia* (1630), Thomas Blount *The Art of Making Devises* (1646), Achille Bocchio *Symbolicarum quaestionum de universo genere* (1555), Jacobus Boschius *Symbolographia* (1702), Giordano Bruno *De imaginum signorum et idearum compositione* (1591), Joachim Camerarius *Symbola et Emblemata* (1595), Nicolas Caussin *De symbolica Aegyptiorum sapientia* (1618), Abraham Fraunce *Insignium, armorum, emblematum, hieroglyphicorum et symbolorum . . . explicatio* (1588), Christophoro Giarda *Icones symbolicae* (1626), Paolo Giovio *Dialogo dell' imprese militari et amorose* (1555), Horapollo *Hieroglyphica* (1517), Jacob Masen *Speculum imaginum veritatis occultae, exhibens symbola, emblemata, hieroglyphica, aenigmata* (1650), Claude-François Menestrier *La*

Manning calls attention to the fact – otherwise also known from Lotman and Foucault –, that this early modern body of symbol theory exhibits the enormous changes in cultural representation that had been taking place between the Middle Ages and Romanticism. The study of Renaissance and Baroque theories reveals primarily the terminological inconsistencies among the various genres of symbolic expression. There are almost no two authors who understood emblem, enigma, parabole, or hieroglyph in exactly the same sense. As Manning mentions, Claude Mignault at the end of the 16th century gave seven different definitions for 'symbol' under the following chapter heading: "Quid Symbolum, et quotuplex sit huius vocis acceptio?"[46]In connection with these terminological uncertainties we had better accept the pragmatist approach widely applied in today's literary theory: 'emblem' and 'symbol' are what the people of early modern culture considered as symbol and emblem, and if they called them with different names, we also have to appreciate that practice.

In today's conceptualizations of symbolic expression the differentiation between 'perceiving' and 'seeing' seems crucial, but this differentiation is also done rather pragmatically. If we look at Horapollo's *Hieroglyphica* or the pictures of the emblem books, we immediately notice that on those representations seeing has a logic different from our own. It is, at least partly, an alien visual culture and an unusual way of constructing the world. As if the elements of the pictures had their own life, independent from each other, not constituting a coherent overall composition. These pictures are anti-mimetic and often create a riddle. Manning also calls attention to the structural-phenomenological as well as the sociological aspects of this phenomenon. In those days – largely due to the thorough religious education that dominated peoples lives from their earliest age – the practice of allegorizing so deeply rooted even in the everyday thinking, that 'natural seeing' – which became dominant only from the Enlightenment – was completely subdued by the intertextual web of theological, mythical and literary topoi. Manning, paraphrasing John Dryden, characterizes this situation as follows: "the world was perceived through the spectacles of books" (op. cit., xvi).

At first sight the unshakeable authority of conventional images in such a period the philosophy and science of which started completely eroding the premodern world picture, seems surprising.. Those changes have been registered by cultural historians, such as Basil Willey, as "intellectual historical turning points," reminding us that they contributed to the separation of natural science and the humanities; and to the loss of the prestige of the poetical languages of the emergence of 'clear cut' Cartesian ideas undermined the credibility of the ancient symbols. As T. S. Eliot remarked, this was the "dissociation of sensibility," the waning of that period in which the poets "incorporated their erudition into their sensibility: their mode of feeling was directly and freshly altered by their reading and thought."[47]

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philosophie des images (1682), Claude Paradin *Devises heroiques* (1551), Filippo Picinello *Mundus symbolicus in emblematum universitate formatus* (1681), Johannes Sambucus *Emblemata* (1564), and the works of Jacobus Typotius (*Symbola divina et humana*, 1601, *De hierographia*, 1618).

[46] Mignault's treatise *Syntagma de symbolis* was attached to several editions of Alciati's *Emblemata*. Cited by Manning 1999, xiii, note 2.

[47] V.ö. Willey, *The Seventeenth-Century Background* (1934), *passim*; and T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," in Eliot, *Selected Essays* (1951), 286. To demonstrate the late-seventeenth-century distrust in symbols and figurative speech is Thomas Sprat's *The History of the Royal Society*, in which he condemns figurative expression

The paradox is partly resolvable if we scrutinize our own agenda as interpreters. Until the rise of post-structuralism (i.e. the end of the 1970s), intellectual history seemed to be interested in finding and documenting the continuity of tradition and the linear progress of human development, thus, creating attractive 'grand narratives.' In such a context the strength of the conventional images and literary topoi seemed to be so massive that scholars were inclined to overlook the cracks on the system of beliefs and expression. Historians have only recently started highlighting the latent iconoclastic tendencies and the differences between Catholic and Protestant approaches to images in the early modern period. If we try to trace the sources of contemporary authorities, we encounter more and more contradiction and uncertainty. Some emphasized the 'Book of Nature' as the ultimate authority, others opted for the dominance of the author. Again, for some the antiquity of the author was the decisive factor, others could be satisfied with contemporary voices, too. There was no agreement about the superiority of genres either, precedence was given once to visual, at other times to oral or textual transmission. If we study the early modern debates about the authority of pictures or texts, or about the hierarchy of literary/pictorial genres, we immediately discover the variety and the antagonisms in the seemingly homogeneous premodern world view.[48]

These problems are further considered by Daniel Russell in his essay, "Perceiving, Seeing and Meaning: Emblems and Some Approaches to Reading Early Modern Culture" (1999, 77-92). His starting point is that perception and seeing should not be mixed with each other; here he follows Gombrich's article of 1981 ("Image and Code: Scope and Limits of Conventionalism in Pictorial Representation") in which the Warburgian art historian partially revoked his formerly conventionalist conviction about the textual nature of images and suggested that conventional and 'natural' pictures might be differentiated from each other. Although this notion triggered strong reaction from post-structuralist art historians (e.g. W. J. T. Mitchell, 1986, 75-93; see below), Russell agrees with the possibility that optical-biological perception can generate 'natural' images, he emphasizes, however, that we have no chance to 'see' these 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 Russell's study.

His first observation about 'natural' picture elements is, that the seemingly naturalistic background motifs in emblem pictures are in fact carry symbolic-allegorical meaning that help the interpretation of the foreground (op. cit., 78).

According to his second important observation, on emblem pictures the spatial relations appear different from what we would expect reading the accompanying poems. He explains this by referring to the orality studies of Marshal McLuhan and Walter J. Ong. As they suggested, the 'oral imagination' would not look at a picture in its entirety, rather, it would look for (or construct) a narrative line to scan the image-elements step by step. Following this linear procedure, the viewer then would use variable strategies to create connections among the elements, usually between two at a time (op. cit., 82). According to Russell we should call this technique 'quasi-literacy' and the structure of a picture produced by it resembles the structure

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as follows: "Who can behold withou indignation how many mists and uncertainties those specious tropes and figures have brought on our knowledge?" (*The History of the Royal Society*, 1667, in Abrams ed. 1979, 1704).

[48] See Drysdall, "Authorities for Symbolism in the Sixteenth Century" (1999).

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 Corrozet's contemporaries did so too" (ibid.).[49]

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. According to Russell this logic of coordination can be found not only in painting, but in poetry – for example in the metaphoric imagery of Petrarchan love lyrics –, too.[50]

All this does not fully explain the rise of naturalistic and realistic tendencies in Renaissance art, for example the discovery of the rules of perspective and their fast dissemination among the artists. Russell's conclusion is that early modern Europeans started reading 'the Book of Nature' less automatically and less 'well' than their medieval predecessors; at the same time symbolization as image-function became more and more contested by representation, just as discursive logic and scientific observation started subverting the whole concept of the Book of Nature (op. cit., 88). Emblems seem to document the various stages of this complex procedure and are particularly useful to gain information about the way how early modern people actually *saw* nature and their own world. This research, however, must not treat emblems as a privileged, isolated genre, rather, they have to be looked at in the wider contexts of the representational logic and the general semiotics of the age.[51]

2.3 Emblematic Expressions, Emblematic Structures

When speaking about emblematic expressions and structures, we have to consider the whole spectrum of early modern cultural representations, since – as I have already suggested – there were no aspects of Renaissance or Baroque life completely free from this way of seeing. 'Emblematic' symbolism did not only determine the logic of artistic expression but also the semiotics of everyday life. As we have seen, the decorations and ornaments of the house, the furniture, the tapestries, the jewels and household items all made early modern people, in every minute of their life 'scan and interpret.'[52]

Next to objects we can also think of huge areas permeated with conventional symbolism

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[49] Russell reminds of an interesting analogy from McLuhan's *The Guttenberg Galaxy*: once the members of a completely orally cultured African tribe were shown a medical educational film. The viewers could only understand from the film that "there was a chicken in it." Since the film followed the logic of written narratives, the viewers could not comprehend its logic. The accidental image of the chicken did not fit in this logic, so they immediately noticed it as something 'sticking out.'

[50] Russell here cites Elizabeth Cropper's "On Beautiful Women. Parmigianino, *Petrarchismo*, and the Vernacular Style" (*Art Bulletin* 58 [1976]: 374-9).

[51] A few interesting essays can be found in Wolfgang Harms and Dietmar Peil's collection, *Polyvalenz und Multifunktionalität der Emblematik* (2002), e.g. Rüdiger Zymner, "Das Emblem als offenes Kunstwerk," Daniel Russell, "Illustration, Hieroglyph, Icon. The Status of Emblem Picture," Thomas Althaus, "Differenzgewinn. Einwände gegen die Theorie von der Emblematik als synthetisierende Kunst."

[52] See the chapter "'Extra-Literary' Emblematics: Painting, Tapestery, Carving, Jewellery, Funerary Monuments, Imprese" in Daly, Silcox 1991, 203-38.

such as dressing fashions,[53] religious vestments and the iconography of processions and pilgrimages,[54] the conventional meanings of body language and gestures (from greetings to the choreography of oath taking),[55] the symbolism of entertainments, such as tournaments and tilting, carnival, dance; and, last but not least, the rituals and ceremonies of public and social life, from court festivals and royal entries to funerals; from witch burning to public executions.[56] All these spectacles were topped by the very complex *Gesamtkunst*-expression of medieval and Renaissance theater – to which I will return promptly.

High art and literature were equally taking their share in this 'applied emblematics.' As iconographical studies have suggested, Michelangelo's Medici tombs in Florence or Rafael's frescoes in the Vatican Stanzas were all created on the basis of complicated literary programs, or at least they followed and symbolically used the elements of the large, Classical and Judeo-Christian mythological systems.[57] This technique was universal in early modern Europe and in the Baroque centuries it became the main catalyzer of ecclesiastical art from Spain to Hungary.[58]

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[53] See the huge body of scholarly literature on fashions, e.g. Annemarie Bönsch, *Formengeschichte europeischen Kleidung* (Wien: Böhlau, 2001); Jack Cassin-Scott, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Costume and Fashion: 1550-1920* (Poole: Blandford, 1987); Marilyn R. DeLong, Patricia A. Hemmis, "HistoricCostume and Image: A Factor in Emblem Analysis," in Bagley, Griffin, McLean ed. 1996, 11738; Hans Heinrich Glaser, *Was Man Trug Anno 1634: Die Basler Kostümfolge*, ed. Alfred R. Weber (Bázel: GS-Verlag, 1993), etc.

[54] E.g. Linda Kay Davidson, *Pilgrimage in the Middle Ages: A Research Guide*(New York: Garland, 1993); Belting, *Bild und Kult* (1990), etc.

[55] On the rhetoric of the body see Peter Burke, "Gesture Language in EarlyModern Italy," in his *Varieties of Cultural History* (1997); Lynn Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Darryll Grantley, *The Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); Michal Krobialka, *This Is My Body: Representational Practices in the Early Middle Ages* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); Cornelia Mueller, *Redebegleitende Gesten: Kulturgeschichte, Theorie, Sprachvergleich* (Berlin: Spitz, 1998, Körper– Zeichen–Kultur 1); Jean Claude Schmitt, *La Raison de gestes dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), etc.

[56] Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Rites of Violence," in Davis 1975, 152-187; Richard van Dülmen, *Theater des Schreckens. Gerichtspraxis und Strafrituale* (München: Oskar Beck, 1985); Samuel Y. Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment: Art and Criminal Prosecution during the Florentine Renaissance*(Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Richard J. Evans, *Rituals of Retribution: Capital Punishment in Germany, 1600-1987* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Kristóf Ildikó, "How to Make a (Legal) Pact with the Devil?" in Klaniczay Gábor, Pócs Éva ed., *Christian Demonology and Popular Mythology in Early Modern Europe* (Budapest: CEUPress, forthcoming); Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross, and the Wheel: Pain and Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999); Marcia Pointon, "Wearing Memory. Mourning, Jewellery and the Body,"in Gisela Ecker ed., *Trauer tragen – Trauer zeigen: Inszenierungen der Geschlechter* (München: Fink, 1999), 6583; Maria Clara Ruggieri Tricoli, *Il "funeral teatro": apparati e mausolei effimeri dal XVII al XX secolo a Palermo* (Palermo: Ila Palma, 1993); etc. On court festivals see Mulryne and Goldring ed., *Court Festivals of the European Renaissance* (2002) and the forthcoming two volume representative edition of J. R. Mulryne, Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly and Margaret Shewring ed., *Europa Triumphans: Court Festivals in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004). In German scholarship recently has evolved a new subfield, called "Zeremonial wissenschaft," the study of early modern ceremonies. See Bauer, *Hofökonomie. Der Diskurs über den Fürstenhof in Zeremonialwissenschaft* (1997) and Velc, *Zeremonialwissenschaft im Fürstenstaat* (1998).

[57] See the famous debate between the two 'princes' of art historians, Erwin Panofsky and Ernst Gombrich as remembered by the latter in Gombrich, Eribon 1991, chapter 3.1.

[58] For some famous Hungarian examples ofBaroque emblematic art see Bencze Lóránt, "Function Oriented Iconography. A CaseStudy of the Baroque Refectory of the Abbey of Pannonhalma," in Szőnyi ed. 1996, 63-76; and

Speaking about literature, Peter Daly's mentioned monograph (1998 [1979]) offers a good typology of emblematic structures appearing in early modern textual works. Most important among these is the WORD EMBLEM, being a complex figure or trope which evokes or describes an emblematic *pictura* and in the given context uses it metaphorically. 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:

> *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.*[59]

This soliloquy in fact unites the ekphrastic description of an emblem picture together with its *subscriptio*-like comment.

In the love lyrics of the Hungarian Renaissance poet, Bálint Balassi, we find an emblematic portrayal of Cupid in an interestingly subversive way: the poem's argumentation denies the described traditional iconography:

> *Bezzeg nagy bolondság volt az balgatagban,*
> *Cupidot ki írta gyermekábrázatban,*
> *Mert nem gyermek, aki bír mindent világban. [. . .]*
> *Látjuk minden szívet mely igazán talál,*
> *Kit célul arányoz lűni mérges nyíllal,*
> *Hát nem vak, sőt, jól lát szeme világával.*
> *Szárnyát sem hihetem, kin ő repülhetne,*
> *Azon is megtetszik, mert fekszik heverve*
> *Régen én szívemben, csak tüzet rak benne.*

Éva Knapp, Gábor Tüskés, "Rhetorisches Konzept und ikonographisches Programm des Freskenzyklus in der Prunkstiege des Raaber Jesuitenkollegs," in Harms, Peil ed. 2002, 949-77.

[59] 4.1.184-195, quoted from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 276.

[It was a folly on the part / who depicted Cupid as a child / Since no child is that who subdues evey kind. // We see how easily he hits every heart / he decides to aim at with his poisonous dart. / Nor is he blind, he sees indeed well with his eyes. // I cannot believe in his wings, either / since he has been lying idle / in my heart, only fueling my fire...][60]

Although less rigorously using the generic boundaries, Philip Sidney in his *The Defence of Poesie* created a kind of philosophy of word emblems in his famous description of "speaking pictures":

So no doubt the philosopher with his learned definition – be it of virtue, vices, matters of public policy or private government – replenishes 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 poetry.[61]

According to Daly (1998, 74-83) the literary word emblem either comes directly from emblem books (real ekphrasis), or the poet constructs it on the analogy of emblems (quasi-ekphrasis). In both cases emblems and emblem books provided important inspiration to literature. Daly's inventory enlists among the recipients of emblematic imagery all the major literary kinds: poetry, narratives and drama. Perhaps the most numerous examples can be found in EMBLEMATIC POETRY in which word emblems were not simple pieces of decoration, rather conceptual structural elements, especially in Baroque lyrics, such as the English metaphysical poetry, or the German religious versifying (Angelus Silesius). A special class of emblematic poetry is the popular Baroque genre of picture poems, such as George Herbert's "The Altar," or the curious shapes (circle-poem, romboid poem) presented in George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589). FIGURE 13 shows a German Baroque picture-poem, representing a cedar, the holy tree

Figure 13

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[60] The poem was written in the 1580s. My rough translation, the Hungarian text is quoted from: *Balassi Bálint versei* (Budapest: Balassi, 1994), 92.

[61] Quoted from Roy Lamson, Hallett Smith ed., *The Golden Hind. An Anthology of Elizabethan Prose and Poetry* (New York: Norton, 1951), 281.

of life.[62]

Among prose narratives one can find emblematic episodes, fables, or emblematic title pages, nevertheless, the most impressive utilization of the emblematic technique was carried out in the English Renaissance theater. This has been the subject matter of much scholarly literature since the 1930s and Daly himself devoted two longer essays to this phenomenon, further developing what he had to say in his book in 1979 (cf. Daly 1984, 1993). This alone should justify my decision to devote a subchapter to the question of emblematic drama.

2.4 Renaissance Emblematic Theater and the Study of Shakespeare's Imagery

The phenomenon of emblematic theater could be approached from various directions. One could start the discussion with the general questions of theater-semiotics, or with a review of the development of emblematic scenography from its beginnings in the medieval mystery cycles and moralities. In what follows I shall pursue yet another way: the historiography of the study of Shakespeare's imagery which followed quite closely the twists and turns of twentieth-century poetics, iconology and emblem-research.[63]

Somewhat paradoxically, the study of visuality and the relationship between words and pictures in Renaissance drama started in such a way that it completely neglected the theatricality of the plays, that is their realization on the stage in performance. It was English and American New Criticism which – concentrating on the written text – started IMAGERY-RESEARCH from the 1930s onwards. As S. Viswanathan's monograph on that trend wittily expressed by its very title: the Shakespeare play was considered merely as poem.[64] Further steps could only slowly be taken. As Wolfgang Clemen wrote in1951: "That Shakespeare's imagery has had to wait long for the attention and consideration it deserves is no matter of mere chance, but the result of gradual process, in the course of which men have slowly learned to understand Shakespeare's work in all its different aspects."[65]

This shift was in accordance with the main issues of contemporary literary theory. The positivism of the turn of the century established the norms of exact investigation, with demand for data, documentation, scientific analysis. The rise of formalism, Russian structuralism, and American New Criticism, on the other hand, emphasized the central role of the linguistic medium of the literary work of art. Another interesting new approach, the psychological orientation to literary history, threw new light on the role of associations in the creative as well as the perceptive process of literary communication. Finally, a philosophically and historically oriented trend, 'Geistesgeschichte' (a close relative of the history of ideas) tried to create a wider

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[62] See also Helen Gardner, *The Metaphysical Poets*(London: Penguin, 1957); Lewalski 1979; Louis Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962); Rosamund Tuve, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947). On geometric poetry a comprehensive monograph is Piotr Rypson, *Obraz słowo (1989); on Hungarian picture poetry see István Kilián, A régi magyar képvers (1998). Puttenham's The Arte of English Poesie was published in G. Gregory Smith, Elizabethan Critical Essays (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971 [1904]), 2: 1-193.*

[63] The following review is a shortened version of my "From Image Hunting to Semiotics. Changing Attitudes toward Shakespeare's Imagery" (2000).

[64] Viswanathan, *The Shakespeare Play as Poem* (1980).

[65] Clemen, *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery* (1983), 10.

context, embracing all these studies, looking for the general world picture behind the individual idiom and structure of a work or of an author's *oeuvre*. Most of these studies focusing on Shakespearean drama concentrated on the nature of poetical expression while at their best they also took into consideration the wider dramatic or motivational context, too.[66] The really efficient study of Shakespeare's imagery, however, could only be started after having taken into consideration the visual aspects of the dramas, primarily that of theatricality.

The first steps in this direction were inspired by ICONOGRAPHY, a very attractive method of art history, developed by Erwin Panofsky. Among literary historians Samuel C. Chew came as early as in 1947 to realize the advantages of juxtaposing literature and the visual arts when studying Renaissance literature:

By means of these images our forefathers sought to express their experiences [. . .] and one cannot contemplate them without recognizing that these great commonplaces are still applicable to the human situation. [. . .] An awareness of the parallel is not necessary for an understanding of the dramatic situation but adds to it a richness and subtlety of allusion. [. . .] I believe that the dramatist, while not puzzling his audience with misplaced erudition, sometimes provided for the happy few an enriching suggestiveness not discernible upon the surface of the dialogue, action and characterization (4-5).

The same principles of approach are echoed in Peter Daly's most recent definition of iconography:
Iconography is, properly speaking, the identification of motifs, stories, and allegories, with their associated themes and concepts. Iconographical analysis presupposes a familiarity with specific themes or concepts as transmitted through literary sources, whether acquired by purposeful reading or by oral tradition. In general, iconography depends on a stable connection between object and meaning, and requires a shared knowledge about the symbolic meanings of physical objects and their arrangements (1984, 117).

A great variety of visual artworks and illustrations have been paired with Shakespearean texts in order to elucidate the meaning of verbal images and stage effects, which often, as Chew noted, were messages directed to those 'happy few' who could get on the proper track of association.

One of the most specialized aspects of the research into Shakespeare's visuality has become the study of emblems in relation with literary texts. A growing body of scholars is nowadays cultivating it, and it can be considered a special territory of iconographic analysis. EMBLEM RESEARCH aims at revealing emblematic and iconographic details in a work of literature, asserting that their function is "to clarify, deepen and even complicate the contexts in which they appear. Emblems may enrich the meaning of character, theme, or dramatic grouping on the stage" (Daly 1984, 120).

The emblem collections can be considered as visual dictionaries of the age, transmitting

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[66] See for example, F. C. Kolbe, *Shakespeare's Way* (London, 1930); Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1935, reprint 1952); G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), and his subsequent books: *The Imperial Theme* (1931), *The Shakespearean Tempest* (1932) and *The Crown of Life* (1947).

a commonly shared mythological and moralizing lore in an easily accessible and digestible form. By Shakespeare's time emblem books, although at the beginning they were of a dark, mysterious, exclusive nature, became more widely known and they soon served almost as the kind of primers in classical and Christian moral symbolism. It seems very plausible, then, that a definitely non-*poeta doctus*, like Shakespeare, turned for popular knowledge to such collections rather than to bulky volumes of philosophy or theology. It should nevertheless be remembered that modern studies have also shown that in literature the treatment of iconographic and emblematic commonplaces is by no means unambiguous, and tradition-bound images must be interpreted according to the complex dynamism of convention and subversion, iconophobia and iconoclasm.

The first period of the studies comparing Shakespeare's texts and emblems ranges from Henry Green's "often criticized but little read book" (1870) to Dieter Mehl's important article (1969) which for the first time ventured at definitions and a clear classification of emblematic elements and aspects of Elizabethan drama.

According to Mehl, there are three ways of looking for emblematic elements in English Renaissance drama:

1/ The most obvious manner in which emblems can be used within plays is by direct borrowing or quotation. In English plays of the period, we do indeed find a great number of emblematic images used as similes, but they are for the most part so closely integrated in the dramatic movement of the scene that they lose their static and pictorial character and are hardly recognizable as emblems (Mehl calls them "veiled emblem").

2/ Another form of the emblematic in drama involves the insertion of allegorical scenes or tableaux which provide a pictorial commentary on the action of the play, thus creating that mutually illuminating combination of word and picture which is central to the emblematic method. Of course, the primary source of this technique has to be sought not in the emblem books but mainly in those popular allegorical and emblematic pageants and civic entertainments that were often devised by well-known dramatists (see FIGURE 14, an emblematic setting created by Inigo Jones for Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Queens*).

3/ Apart from the quoted emblems and emblematic shows, there was also a less obtrusive manner in which emblems were incorporated into English Renaissance drama – as emblematic images in the course of a scene, as a significant combination of verbal and pictorial expression. Mehl's conclusion goes as follows: "It is in this field that I feel the most interesting and rewarding studies could still be made because here we are discussing not just external influences but the very nature of Elizabethan drama (properties, emblematic scenes, etc.)" (op. cit., 43).

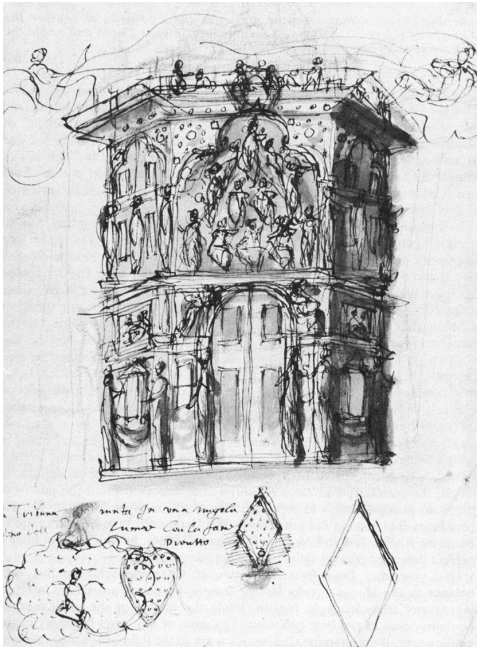

Figure 14

The second period, from the early 1970s, has brought many more theoretical clarifications and seems to have concluded with Peter Daly's studies (1979, 1984) only to give way to recent investigations, more and more systematic and specific. In Hungary, the volume published by the University of Szeged – *Shakespeare and the*

Emblem (Fabiny ed. 1984) – represents similar emphases of research. Among the authors of this book, Tibor Fabiny examined two recurrent motifs in Shakespeare's works – 'veritas filia temporis' and 'theatrum mundi' – extensively based on emblematic analogies. In his preface to the whole volume he also raised more theoretical issues by setting up a framework for emblematic research that would connect the study of iconographic parallels through the notion of tradition (T. S. Eliot) and archetypal models (Northrop Frye) to the general hermeneutical circle of reception (as understood by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur).

Fabiny's program shows that the search for emblematic and other iconographic parallels in no way represents a frontier of studying the visuality of Shakespeare's works. Daly himself limits the validity of emblem research mostly to source-identification and clarification of certain motifs, but even the possibility of setting up such parallels is limited. Some studies have warned about the one-sidedness of becoming too infatuated with emblem research, and these caveats reinforce John M. Steadman's cautious approach already thirty years ago: "The chief value of these emblems for the student of dramatic or non-dramatic literature is (one would like to suggest) their topical character. [...] They could serve not only as media of instruction and persuasion but also as aids in rhetorical and poetic composition. In different hands they could serve as vehicles for moral and political persuasion, alchemical and Platonic doctrine, religious instruction and devotion. Yet they could also assist poetic and oratorial composition, aiding the processes of invention and memory".[67]

If emblem research has focused interest on certain elements of stage imagery (gestures, costumes, properties), another trend, PERFORMANCE CRITICISM – pioneered by George Kernodle (*From Art to Theatre: Form and Convention in the Renaissance*, 1944) and Glynne Wickham (*Early English Stages*, 1966) – has consciously chosen the study of theatricality in opposition to the poetical text. 'Theatricality' suggests a great variety of approaches, from examining the very building of the playhouse, through studying the physical circumstances of the performance, to stage directions and other indicators of how to act out the written words. Consequently performance criticism is by no means restricted to the analysis of actual performances; rather, it is concerned with the potential modes of concretization as suggested by the text.

Perhaps it was Glynne Wickham who has done most to make us understand the nature of representation on the Elizabethan stage. In his several volumes' synthesis – *Early English Stages* – published in the 1960s, he has worked out the concept of emblematic theatre. The novelty of his approach was that, as if sharing the mistrust of post-structuralism – still to come – in 'grand narratives,' he rejected the evolutionist interpretation of English theater-history which tried to create a linear and unbroken story of development from James Burbage's primitive public theater to the complex, multimedial, scenery- and machinery-aided contemporary playhouses. As he wrote, "It is this idea of the necessity of progression, which underlies all those reconstructions of Elizabethan and Jacobean stagecraft that endow the actors, dramatists and stage managers of the time with an ideal of self-consistency in production techniques comparable to that current in more recent times" (Wickham 1966, 154-5). In opposition to the above evolutionist approach he emphasized, that

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[67] Steadman, "Iconography and Methodology in Renaissance Dramatic Study..." (1972/74), 51. Some more caveats: Bevington, *Action is Eloquence* (1984) and Szilassy, "Emblems, Stage, Dramaturgy" (1984).

This concept of progress and direct progression from the Elizabethan theater into Restoration theater via the Court Masks is one which I feel obliged to challenge in the sharpest way I can. [. . .] Instead, I wish to argue that what we are really confronted with is a conflict between an emblematic theater – literally, a theater which aimed at achieving dramatic illusion by figurative representation – and a theater of realistic illusion – literally, a theater seeking to simulate actuality in terms of images. The former kind of theater grew up spontaneously during the Middle Ages and, as I shall argue now, reached its climax in the style of public building depicted by De Witt in his sketch of the Swan.[68]

Wickham then juxtaposes and compares the world models behind the two kinds of theaters as follows:

[The emblematic theater] was an actor's and a poet's theater which received its death warrant from the Lord Chamberlain and his agents in the Revels Office. The new theater which achieved supremacy in its place was a sophisticated, theorist's theater, brought to birth by architect-painters; and although it resembled the old in many externals, it was nevertheless no longer an emblematic theater concerned with man's relations to God and society, but a theater striving to imitate actuality within the more limited terms of reference permitted by images of fashionable conversation and backgrounds of painted perspectives (ibid.).

I have quoted Wickham at length because his opinion has direct links to those important and novel approaches that during the 1960s started interpreting early modern theaters as a paradigmatic cultural representation of that period. One could again recall in this context Albrecht Schöne's book on the medieval exegetical and emblematic roots of the German Baroque theater (1964), or remember Frances Yates' initiative to see Elizabethan theater in relation to Renaissance hermeticism or the *ars memoriae*.[69] At this point we also ought to notice that these intellectual historical works were not independent from the structuralist world view of the 1960s and 1970s, a period which was so much attracted to constructs based on binary oppositions. One can find, no doubt, a certain amount of rigid dualism in Wickham's model, too, however, his noncomformist standpoint paved the way for a new research-trend which is still productive today.

In the followings I am going to deal with such approaches and interpretations which have all been inspired by the theory of the emblematic theater, summarized by Wickham as follows:

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[68] Op. cit., 155. The paradox of the history of the English *public theater* is, that not one fully authentic visual representation has survived about this type of theater building, in spite of the fact that around 1600 there were almost a dozen such institutions in London. The only eye-witness representation, that is De Witt's drawing, has such a sketchy image of the Swan Theater, that historians have not settled up to now the way how it should be understood. Wickham also had a voice in this debate, actually rejecting the idea that the English Renaissance theater buildings were the descendants of the inn-yard playhouses. For these debates see Foakes, *Illustrations of the English Stage 1580-1642* (1985); Jill L. Levenson, "The Recovery of the Elizabethan Stage," in Hibbard ed. 1981, 205-30; F. D. Rowan, "Inns, Inn-Yards, and Other Playing Places," in Hibbard ed. 1981, 1-21; and the works of Andrew Gurr, e.g. *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642* (1980); and Andrew Gurr, Mariko Ichikawa, *Staging in Shakespeare's Theatres* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[69] Cf. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (1966) and *The Theatre of the World* (1969).

[We are confronted here with] a head-on collision of two fundamentally opposed attitudes to art: the typically medieval contentment with emblematic comment on the significance of the visual world versus a new, scientific questing for the photographic image. This search for the technical meansto reproduce actuality, as opposed to an almost exclusive concern with extracting the significance behind outward appearances, is obvious enough in the fine arts of Renaissance Italy; and, where the drama is concerned, nowhere could this conflict of interest become more sharply and swiftly manifest than in methods of scenic presentation.[70]

The study of the emblematic theater makes us to conclude that on the Renaissance stage – following the traditions of medieval mystery plays, moralities and other spectacles of *pageantry* –, artistic representation functioned as a stylized model of human and cosmic existence. The great metaphors of order and hierarchy – such as the neoplatonic analogies, the theories about the dignity of man, and the notion that the artist is like a creative god – were symbolically presented as well as more subversive intuitions discussing the mutability of fortune, the unpredictability of life, or the inevitability of revenge.

The symbolic representation, however, fromthe16th century onward, became more and more complemented by *mimesis*, a theory and practice grounded in classical Greek and Roman drama but also used in the naturalistic scenes of medieval interludes and farces.[71] The mixing of the two modes of representation then lead to such a syncretism of symbolism and naturalism that we have already seen in emblem books. In order to be able to handle and interpret this syncretism Kent Van den Berg in his book on Shakespeare's poetics (1985) introduced the term "*heterocosmos*" to describe such scenes where symbolic *tableaux* were synthesized with microscopic realism. Stage directions, stage effects, properties and tableaux are of utmost importance in this approach, and their study has become especially prolific since the 1970s.[72]

Studying stage effects J. Doebler (*Shakespeare's Speaking Pictures*,1974) established the notion of "iconic scenes," while M. Fleischer (*The Iconography of the English History Play*, 1974) argued for emblematic stage structures, nonverbal stage images. Numerous other studies have shown that the visuality of the Elizabethan theater largely derived from the medieval heritage, especially the late moralities, but equally from the survival of the Gothic courtly and

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[70] Wickham 1966, 209. The tension between naturalistic and symbolic representation mentioned by Wickham originally was elegantly discussed in Erwin Panofsky's *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (1991 [1927]). A study of early modern Italian theatre in relation to the above dichotomy is Götz Pochat, *Theater und bildende Kunst im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance in Italien* (1990); Attila Kiss has discussed the same dichotomy in Elizabethan and Jacobean theater in his *The Semiotics of Revenge. Subjectivity and Abjection in English Renaissance Tragedy* (1995).

[71] See Auerbach, *Mimesis* 1946; and on the symbolic and naturalistic elements of medieval theater: Gordon Kipling, *Enter the King. Theatre, Liturgy and Ritual in the Medieval Civic Triumphs* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998); Alan E. Knight ed., *The Stage as Mirror: Civic Theatre in Late Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997); Pochat 1990 (see the previous note), and the many volumes edited by Clifford Davidson, e.g. *Material Culture and Medieval Drama* (1999); *Gesture in Medieval Drama and Art* (2001).

[72] See e.g. Barbara A. Mowat, "'The Getting Up of the Spectacle': The Role of the Visual on the Elizabethan Stage, 1576-1600," in G. R. Hibbard ed. 1981, 60-77; Ann Pasternak Slater, *Shakespeare the Director* (London: Harvester, 1982); the many works of Alan Dessen on Shakespeare's stage directions, e.g. *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters* (1984), etc.

popular festivities such as pageants, processions, tournaments and royal entries.[73]
Finally, one more trend dealing with Shakespeare and visuality deserves mention. This is a group of studies which examine the literary texts in relation to the visual arts, either on a direct comparative level (parallels between paintings, sculptures and plays), or approaching the problem from the viewpoint of theoretical aesthetics, reconsidering the old principle: 'ut pictura poesis.' Because of this aspect, I call this approach UT PICTURA THEATRUM studies.

Some scholars, like William Heckscher ("Shakespeare in Relation to the Visual Arts" 1970), and R. M. Frye ("'Ut Pictura Poesis': Shared Principles of Organization in Painting and in Shakespearean Drama," 1981) have tried to describe the relationship between Shakespeare's works and the visual arts on the basis of general aesthetic principles. Heckscher, while setting up a casual inventory of 'ut pictura poesis' elements in Shakespeare's art, came to a very important observation about the dramatist's special handling of topics relating literature and the visual arts:

On the whole, we get the impression that as Shakespeare observed paintings, drawings, prints, and sculptures, he stored away in his mind a modicum only of their outward appearance. To express this in simplistic terms, Shakespeare focused his attention on works of art primarily for the sake of their iconographic messages. An oblique reference to an iconographic theme became to him on repeated occasions an ideal vehicle for rhetorical similes. Shakespeare rarely felt compelled to fulfill the role of the rhetorician who conjures up for the benefit of his audience a recognizable work of art. His imagination was not truly reproductive. He reached, however, the sublimest heights wherever he could be certain that the cultured members of his audience were familiar with an artistic motif or theme. [. . .] Shakespeare had a way of alluding to very real works of art in vaguely hinting references, while on the other hand, he would go to great length in describing in minute detail works of art which existed only in his imagination (6-7).

There appear to be two major directions in the study of theatrical imagery and its connection to the emblematic way of seeing. On the one hand the technical aspects of theatricality are being examined, such as stage directions, visual 'effects,' *tableaux*, props, an area of research that has been flourishing since the 1970s. In this field Alan Dessen's *Elizabethan Drama and the Viewer's Eye* (1977) can be taken as a pioneering and programmatic work.

The other direction is broader and more theoretical, aiming at the recovery as well as the synthetic reinterpretation of the whole ideology and representational logic of the emblematic theater. Tracing this line we arrive from Wickham's insights to today's post-structuralist concerns about the emblematic way of seeing and its theoretical background. A look at the latter will serve as the conclusion of this review essay.

3 EMBLEMATIC AND POSTMODERN

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[73] See Alan Dessen, *Shakespeare and the Late Morality Plays* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986) and David M. Bergeron ed., *Peagentry in the Shakespearean Theatre* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1986).

The career of iconography and iconology shows close parallels to the changes in semiotics, literary- and cultural theory from essentialism through historicism and structuralism to pragmatics-oriented reader-response criticism, hermeneutics, New Historicism and other post-structuralist trends. Let us remember how Panofsky defined iconography:

Iconographical analysis, dealing with images, stories and allegories instead of with motifs, presupposes, of course, much more than that familiarity with objects and events which we acquire by practical experience. It presupposes a familiarity with specific themes or concepts as transmitted through literary sources, whether acquired by purposeful reading or by oral tradition (1993, 61).

This would suggest that iconographically determined imagery (for example the very conventional emblems) appeals to such knowledge that is shared by the whole (interpreting) community. And indeed, scholars dealing with iconographical/iconological interpretation, until recently looked at this lore rooted in Classical and the Judeo-Christian traditions as something very stable, conservative, almost archetypal class among cultural representations. Lead by this conviction, scholars often used emblem books as visual dictionaries of the age in order to decipher hidden meanings of works of arts.

Not that Panofsky, the founder of iconography wanted it exactly this way. He himself warned against the uncritical reliance on iconography, and pointed out the rather limited use of this descriptive method: "Iconography is, therefore, a description and classification of images much as ethnography is a description and classification of human races: it is a limited and, as it were, ancillary study which informs us as to when and where specific themes were visualized by which specific motifs" (1994, 57).

By now we clearly see, that the rise of revisionist, post-structuralist iconology was first triggered by the realization of the dangers of the mentioned dictionary-analogy. This was in fact first voiced by traditional intellectual historians, who were not particularly interested in post-structuralist argumentation. Peter Daly, who earlier had associated himself with the 'essentialist' camp, in 1993 called attention to the risks that can follow from adapting oneself to the dictionary analogy. Such a book, if used without enough competence, can easily lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations, enough to think of the traps laid by synonyms and homonyms (cf. Daly 1993, *passim*).

This danger, of course, characterizes not only languages but all other sign systems, including iconographical symbols. Any semiotic system can generate ambiguous meanings in two different ways: 1/ the code – as fixed by tradition/convention– is itself equivocal; 2/ ambivalence is generated during reception, i.e. via the hermeneutical process. As for the former, in European cultural history we encounter a very old and very strong tradition to use the same symbolic images in diametrically opposing sense: *in bonam partem* and *in malam partem* (cf. Daly 1998, 49ff – see also above).

As for the latter, to recognize this process we need to empathize with some of the dilemmas, raised by post-structuralism. Perhaps the most important point is, that if the meaning is generated during the reception process between the text and the audience, then the horizon of expectation, as defined by Hans Robert Jauss, will change from reader to reader, from community to community, thus finally resulting in uncountable variants of possible correct meanings. This phenomenon has been clearly described by Daly, as follows:

Emblem books may be regarded as dictionaries which document meaning and use. They are not, however, infallible decoders of the meanings of motifs in various contexts because emblematic and iconographic codes do not convey single signations, but potentially pluri-signations. The idea that emblems are based on one-to-one relationship of thing to meaning, or image to meaning is an oversimplification. As repositories of the verbal and visual culture of an earlier period emblems can be an indispensable guide. But like dictionaries they can be used or abused. Seeing is believing, but what we see is in a sense a function of what we believe, or what we know. What we see also depends in some measure on what we are looking for, and capable of finding (Daly 1993, 20).

This very modern sounding thesis actually is a direct descendant of Ernst Gombrich's opinion from 1948: "Our attitude towards the image is inextricably bound up with our whole idea about the universe" (Gombrich 1948, 125) and "Our attitude towards words and images we use continually varies. It differs according to the level of consciousness. What is rejected by wide-awake reason may still be accepted by our emotions. [. . .] In the history of European thought this duality of attitudes is somehow reflected in the continuous co-existence of Neo-Platonic mysticism and Aristotelian intellectualism" (op. cit., 179).

These views by now are fully accepted in traditional emblem research, too, or perhaps we should say, by now emblem research has also undergone a theoretical reorientation as we can see in the works of John Manning, Daniel Russell and others. As these authors emphasize: *perception* as a physical-biological process has to be distinguished from *seeing*, as a socially conditioned cognitive act.

Catalyzed by post-structuralism (perhaps primarily by deconstruction), the above introduced process of 'mild revisionism' has also produced rather surprising, extreme opinions, too. According to these voices, meanings are limitless, semiosis is unlimited. For example by the mid-1990s Stephen Orgel came to the conclusion that emblems, which earlier had been considered to have very stable meaning, are in fact the most fluid, most ephemeral texts:

Even within individual handbooks, the breadth of interpretive possibility often seems both endless, and, for modern readers looking for a key to Renaissance symbolism, distressingly arbitrary. Renaissance iconographies and mythographies are in this respect the most postmodern of texts, in which no meaning is conceived to be inherent, all signification is constructed or applied; the fluidity and ambivalence of the image are of the essence.[74]

The heart of the problem is that we do (and cannot) know how to read a Renaissance picture:

How do we know how to read a Renaissance image? In the simplest cases, we have Renaissance guides to interpretation, in the form of iconologies and handbooks of symbolism. Yet such cases immediately become less simple when we observe that reading imagery through them depends on reading texts, and therefore shares in all the interpretive ambiguity of that process: the reading of texts is a dialectical, and sometimes even an adversarial, procedure. Interpretation depends, moreover, on what texts we select as relevant, and even on what we are willing to treat

[74] Orgel, "Gendering the Crown," (1996), 136.

as text (Orgel 1996, 133).

Figure 15

Orgel mobilizes quite a magnificent apparatus to prove his truth. Brings numerous examples from Shakespeare to illustrate when the dramatist actually subverts the traditional meanings of symbolic images, what is more, when such complex ambiguities are developed in his text that generate an infinite and unstoppable oscillation between alternatives of meaning. His most galvanizing argument is the exegesis of the pelican-image. As we know, in Christian typology this bird is the symbol of Christ's self-sacrifice, based on the premodern scientific notion that the pelican mother feeds her children with her own blood (see FIGURE 15, a traditional pelican-image from a Hungarian publication of 1702).

According to Orgel, this symbolic image carries more than one ambiguities. To begin with, the mother-bird stands for the male Christ, the Savior thus changes gender, the kingly male giving way to the nurturing founder of the Catholic church. Furthermore, a really unnerving tension can be generated by considering the whole context of the image. The little pelicans, accepting the blood of their mother, thus commit cannibalistic matricide. This is the case of interpretation when "overstanding"[75] (as opposed to understanding) leads to such new and exciting readings which do not seek what is said (or shown by the image), rather, what is concealed.

Such approach to texts and images, of course, has not been the privilege of modern critics. The morale of Orgel's argument is that any member of an interpretive community at any time could subvert the traditions and symbols of his/her own community, in fact, the great artists have always done so. In *Richard II* the old John of Gaunt turns to his cousin, the young king with the following bitter remark:

> *O, spare me not, my brother Edward's son;*
> *That blood already, like the pelican,*
> *Hast thou tapped out and drunkenly caroused (2.1.124-7).*

The quotation shows that Shakespeare did accomplish the subversive step and used the image of the self-sacrificing pelican to refer to the cannibalistic cruelty of the young generation. Orgel dryly comments: "The only way to have the topos to have it both ways" (op. cit., 134).

It seems that one has to find the radical and subversive meaning only once; then it continues its life as if by itself. Shakespeare also 'recycled' the image of the cannibalistic pelican kids in *King Lear*, but he also managed to give a new twist to it. Lear speaks about his "pelican daughters" (3.4.77), and the power of the image is that the matricide here becomes the symbol of even more general filial ingratitude. Although– as Orgel admits –, there is no Renaissance dictionary of symbols that would allow this radical reading, it seems to be right to claim

[75] Jonathan Culler's term, see Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (1992), 114-5.

that this fact should be no impediment to such understanding.[76]

Let us try once again to formulate the purposes of iconography and iconology, taking into consideration the classical definitions of Panofsky as well as the recent, post-structuralist concerns. An 'iconographical program' means, that ideas or stories are represented by means of visual or verbal images and the basis of their understanding will be a body of knowledge, conventionally shared by the interpretive community. This is the cultural code. For the 'classics' of iconology, such as Panofsky or Gombrich, the point of interpretation was a correct, or at least 'a less wrong' reading, that is acquiring the code and using it for the sake of meaning.

Post-structuralist iconology seems to step beyond this program, and the new aims are best represented by W. J. T. Mitchell. For him iconology should not be interested in the reception, the generation of meaning only, rather in an even more pragmatic way it should concentrate on the intellectual and emotional reactions triggered by those meanings, which form power relations and a general politics of using words and images. Mitchell suggests the following coordinates in mapping and evaluating the politics of images: *iconophobia, iconophilia / fetishism, iconoclasm,* and *idolatry*. His two groundbreaking books, *Iconology* (1986) and *Picture Theory* (1994) are devoted to this program, thus creating the conceptual framework of post-structuralist iconology.

As for the politics of images Mitchell's initial thesis is that in European culture words and images have always been antagonized. Western thought has basically been 'logocentric,' and has tried to distinguish between words and images by asserting a fundamental difference, always emphasizing the superiority of the former. In such a context comparisons between the two media or their identification have always been considered subversive, as one can see from the various debates relating to the 'ut pictura poesis' principle, or the question of ekphrasis. These deliberations considered images as the center of some particular (and dangerous) power that has to be curbed, controlled, and at the same time exploited.[77] According to this situation, European philosophers, aestheticians and theorists of art and literature have always felt compelled to take side in these debates and become iconophils or iconophobes. Positions in these debates have also

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[76] Orgel is actually wrong in restricting the original traditional meaning to only one interpretation. A quick survey of sources and dictionaries of symbols brings to light that from the very beginnings the pelican image had rather diverting interpretations. Physiologus suggested that the young pelicans, when growing up, hit their parents, because of this they, out of anger, killed their kids. Later they bitterly regretted their rage and offered their own blood to bring them back to life. According to another version, it was the mother pelican who killed the small ones and the father, returning, pierced his chest to give blood to revive the children. Yet another tradition asserts that it was the snake, who sneaked into the nest and killed the chickens, after which the returning parents in concert gave blood to bring back their children to life. The continuation of this story (told by Wolfgang Franzius and reinterpreted by the Hungarian Gáspár Miskolczi) is that some of the reviving kids, noticing their mother had completely exhausted herself, would in turn give blood to the dying mother, while others would not do so. The conclusion is: "There are good and bad children. The good ones take care of their mother while the bad ones will not..." (quoted from Farkas 1982, 125). See also James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects & Symbols in Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 86, 238; George Ferguson, *Sign & Symbols in Christian Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 23; József Pál ed., *Szimbólumtár* (Budapest: Balassi, 1997), 378; etc.

[77] A Hungarian scholar, Mónika Medvegy campares this attitude to 'double bind,' a term used in psychoanalysis. It is an attraction and aversion at the same time that longs for the beautiful representation of images, still remains distrustful of them. See M. Medvegy, "Egy festmény narrativálásának módjai és poetológiai dimenziói. E. T. A. Hoffmann: 'Doge és dogaressa'," in Attila Kiss, Gy. E. Szőnyi ed., *Szó és kép. A művészi kifejezés szemiotikája és ikonográfiája* [Word and Image. The semiotics and iconography of artistic expression] (Szeged: JATEPress, 2002, Ikonológia és műértelmezés 9), 285-99.

meant power relations wrapped in value-judgements.[78] Mitchell sees the more or less hidden agenda of this strife as follows:

The dialectic of word and image seems to be constant in the fabric of signs that a culture weaves around itself. What varies is the precise nature of the weave, the relation of warp and woof. The history of culture is in part the story of a protracted struggle for dominance between pictorial and linguistic signs, each claiming for itself certain proprietary rights on a "nature" to which only it has access. At some moments this struggle seems to settle into a relationship of free exchange along open borders; at other times (as in Lessing's Laocoon*) the borders are closed and a separate peace is declared. Among the most interesting and complex versions of this struggle is what might be called the relationship of subversion, in which language or imagery looks into its own heart and finds lurking there its opposite number. One version of this relation has haunted the philosophy of language since the rise of empiricism, the suspicion that beneath words, beneath ideas, the ultimate reference in the mind is the image, the impression of outward experience printed, painted, or reflected in the surface of consciousness. It was this subversive image that Wittgenstein sought to expel from language, which the behaviorists sought to purge from psychology, and which contemporary art-theorists have sought to cast out of pictorial representation itself. The modern pictorial image, like the ancient notion of "likeness," is at least revealed to be linguistic in its inner workings (Mitchell 1986, 43).*

Why is it, Mitchell asks, that the relationship of words and images are experienced so tense and politicized by theorists and artists alike? Each chapter of his second book, *Picture Theory*, examines one aspect of this conflict, the research of which he divides according to the following areas: 1/ the study of those esthetical and critical systems that have been trying to maintain the demarcation line between the branches of art, especially between verbal and visual expression; 2/ the study of those artistic practices that, in spite of the above theoretical efforts, subverted and transgressed the artificially created barriers between space and time, eye and ear, natural and conventional, iconic and symbolic (with a special reference to *Gesamtkunstwerks*, such as emblems, cartoons, theater, film, and television); and finally 3/ the study of pragmatics, that is the use of images as opposed to the study of meaning or theory of images. He summarizes his polemical program as follows:

One claim of Picture Theory *is that the interaction of pictures and texts is constitutive of representation as such: all media are mixed media, and all representations are heterogeneous; there are no "purely" visual or verbal arts, though the impulse to purify media is one of the central utopian gestures of modernism (Mitchell 1994, 5).*

Relying on revisionist theory as well as on his own practical observations Mitchell asserts that the differences between images and language are not merely formal matters, rather, they are linked with fundamental ideological divisions. In practice, "they are linked to things like the difference between the (speaking) self and the (seen) other; between telling and showing;

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[78] See Mitchell, *Iconology* (1986), 42-6. An excellent and complex analysis of the politics of images in the pre-aesthetical (i.e. pre-Renaissance) age is Belting, *Bild und Kult* (1990).

between 'hearsay' and 'eyewitness' testimony; between words (heard, quoted, inscribed) and objects or actions (seen, depicted, described)," etc. He borrows Michel de Certeau's terminology to describe these differences: "a heterology of representation."[79] Mitchell's postmodern concerns, of course, are not limited to the examination of modern art and the problems of modernism. He tries to embrace the whole history of iconophobia, iconoclasm and iconophilia, reaching back to the ancient practice of ekphrasis, the Renaissance emblems, or the 'multimedial program' of (pre)Romanticism, as we know from his excellent studies of Blake's composite art.[80]

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Thinking over once again the issues and approaches I have reviewed in this essay, we can conclude that iconography and iconology are going to find their place even among the most radical critical trends which deliberately try to emphasize their detachment from the history of ideas as well as from traditional semiotics. The variety of opinions concerning early modern 'emblematics' also make us realize that no synthesis in this research field has been achieved so far, in fact we should not expect anything like that even in the future. Such a synthesis is not actually needed, as the study of images has been and remains more a methodology and a special area of investigation than an independent critical theory having its own philosophy.

As we could see, various approaches such as source-studies, history of ideas, art history, aesthetics, literary interpretation, post-structuralist cultural theory and many more can profit from iconological considerations, but they will interpret the results according to their specific convictions and assumptions. One thing is certain: the complex study of early modern culture will not live without this methodology, no matter in what conceptual frame it will utilize the results and elaborate on them. The future studies in 'emblematics' certainly should not end in the deconstruction of the artistic texts or images, nor in the naive effort to reconstruct the authors' intention, but rather, in a construction of created worlds, artistic universes, for ourselves, interpretive communities. The mechanism of such a construction may very well be similar to the procedure Shakespeare suggests in the case of Richard II:

> *KING RICHARD*
> *My brain I'll prove the female to my soul,*
> *My soul the father, and those two beget*
> *A generation of still-breeding thoughts;*
> *And these same thoughts people this little world,*
> *In humors like the people of this world. (5.5.6-10)*

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[79] Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), quoted by Mitchell 1994, 5.

[80] His first monograph was devoted to *Blake's Composite Art* (1978) but he has revisited this artist in *Picture Theory*: "Visible Language: Blake's Art of Writing" (1994, 111-51).

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ILLUSTRATIONS

1. A tripartite emblem from Andrea Alciato's *Emblematum libellus* (Paris edition, 1542). Reproduced from Daly 1998, 13.
2. "The Tablet of Cebes: The Emblem of Human Life."In John Davies, *The Life and Philosophy of Epictetus* (London, 1670), foldout frontispiece. Reproduced from Heninger 1977, 181.
3. Key to the Tablet of Cebes. From John Davies, *The Life and Philosophy of Epictetus* (London, 1670), 128. Reproduced from Heninger 1977, 180.
4. "Prudenza."From Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Budapest: Balassi, 1997), 494.
5. Michel Colombe, "The Tomb of Francis II, Prince of Brittany and his Wife, Margaret" (15021507). Nantes, Peter-Paul cathedral, France. Photo by György E. Szőnyi, 1997.
6. Hunting scene on a misericord (1520). Beverley Minster, York. Photo by György E. Szőnyi, 2001.
7. Biblical and mythological symbolism onthegateof a burgher house (1528). Goslar, Germany, Harz-mountains. Photo by György E. Szőnyi, 2002.
8. "The Resurrection of Christ and Jonah's Escape from the Whale." *Biblia pauperum [...] képei a Szépművészeti Múzeum kódexében* (Budapest: Európa, 1988), 26v.
9. The coat of arms of the Percy family on their tomb (14th century). Beverley Minster, England. Photo by György E. Szőnyi, 2001.
10. The stylized coat of arms of Shakespeare upon the wall of the Shakespeare Centre, Stratford-upon-Avon. Photo by György E. Szőnyi, 2001.
11. Pub-sign from contemporary Cambridge. Photo by György E. Szőnyi, 2000.
12. The portrait of an aristocratic couple with heraldic elements. Hans Eworth, "Thomas Howard, 4thDuke of Norfolk and his wife, Margaret Audley" (1562-3). Reproduced from Neville Williams, *All the Queen's Men. Elizabeth I and her Courtiers* (London: Cardinal, 1974), 111.
13. A picture poem of Gottfried Kleiner, "Cedar"(1732). Reproduced from Rypson 1989,

184.

14. "The House of Fame."An emblematic setting created by Inigo Jones for Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Queens*. Reproduced from Stephen Kogan, *The Hieroglyphic King: Wisdom and Idolatry in the Seventeenth-century Masque* (London: Associated University Presses, 1986), 89.

15. A traditional pelican-image from a Hungarian publication: Franzius Farkas, *Egy jeles Vadkert...* (translated and edited by Gáspár Miskolczi, Lőcse, 1702). Reproduced from Henrik Farkas, *Legendák állatvilága* (Budapest: Natura, 1982), 125.