

The International Emblem: From Incunabula to the Internet

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Selected Proceedings
of the Eighth International Conference
of the Society for Emblem Studies,
28th July-1st August, 2008, Winchester College

Edited by

Simon McKeown

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P U B L I S H I N G

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For Jean Michel Massing

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	xiii
----------------	------

Introduction	xv
--------------------	----

Part I: The Formation of the Renaissance Emblem

Chapter One.....	2
------------------	---

Emblems and their Contexts: A Generic Overview

John Manning

Chapter Two	21
-------------------	----

Emblems and Reverses: The Back of the Medal in Sixteenth-Century Italy

Philip Attwood

Chapter Three	47
---------------------	----

The Reverse of the *As* of Nîmes: An Emblematic Puzzle

Rubem Amaral, Jr

Chapter Four	69
--------------------	----

Pre-Alciato Emblems?: Daniel Agricola's *Vita Beati* from the Year 1511

Seraina Plotke

Chapter Five	82
--------------------	----

La Nef des Folles (The Ship of Female Fools) by Jehan Drouyn

(Paris, c.1500)

Yona Pinson

Chapter Six	97
-------------------	----

Belles Lettres: Hieroglyphs, Emblems and the Philosophy of Images

Pedro Germano Leal

Chapter Seven.....	112
--------------------	-----

Emblematic Tradition in Renaissance Printers' Devices in Poland

Justyna Kiliańczyk-Zięba

Part II: Emblems in Discourses of Politics, Power and Prestige

Chapter Eight.....	136
The Medal and its Reverse: Iconographic Models in the Conflicts of Early Modern Europe	
Cristina Fontcuberta i Famadas	
Chapter Nine.....	155
Gothic Reformation: Emblems and Scriptural Authority in Seventeenth-Century Sweden	
Simon McKeown	
Chapter Ten	170
Celebration Time: The <i>Imago primi saeculi Societatis Iesu</i> and its Dutch Adaptation as Part of the Festivities of 1640 Commemorating the Jesuit Order's Centenary	
Lien Roggen	
Chapter Eleven	201
More <i>Emblemes ou devises chrétiennes</i> – Same Title but very different Work	
Alison M. Saunders	
Chapter Twelve	235
“Non Manus Magis Quam Ingenia Exercere”: Imperial Propaganda on Emblematic Targets	
Elisabeth Klecker	

Part III: The Emblem Goes Global: The Migration of the Sign

Chapter Thirteen.....	264
The Reception of Dutch Emblems in Japan: Shiba Kōkan (1748-1818) and Jan and Caspar Luyken's <i>Het Menselyk Bedryff</i>	
Hiroaki Ito	
Chapter Fourteen	283
Privileges of the “Others”: The Coats of Arms granted to Indigenous Conquistadors	
Mária Castañeda de la Paz and Miguel Luque-Talaván	

Chapter Fifteen	317
The Invention of Tradition and an Indigenous Coat of Arms	
Michel R. Oudijk	

Chapter Sixteen	338
The Laughing Lion: From Silence, to the Gesture, to the Emblem	
Anna Maranini	

Chapter Seventeen	350
<i>Reviriscit Y' All: The South Carolina Legacy of a Renaissance Impresa</i>	
Eirwen E.C. Nicholson	

Part IV: The Emblem in its Literary Contexts

Chapter Eighteen	374
“To Thee the Reed is as the Oak”: Fable, Emblem and Shakespeare’s <i>Cymbeline</i>	
Alvan Bregman	

Chapter Nineteen	400
New Riddles from the Sphinx: A Dialogue of Emblems in Ben Jonson’s Court Masque <i>Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly</i> (1611)	
Jennifer J. Craig	

Chapter Twenty	412
Emblem and <i>Exemplum</i> in Maurice Scève’s <i>Délie: object de plus haulte vertu</i> (1544)	
Michael J. Giordano	

Chapter Twenty One	426
“In a Streight betweene Two”: The Fraught Position of Quarles’s Devotional Emblems	
Deanna Smid	

Chapter Twenty Two	438
Body, Soul and Anatomy in Francis Quarles’s Emblems	
Johnathan H. Pope	

Chapter Twenty Three	464
Figuring Shandean Tales: <i>Tristram Shandy</i> Illustrations and the Rhetoric of Emblems	
Brigitte Friant-Kessler	
Chapter Twenty Four	483
Walter Crane's Columbian Emblem Book	
James Tanis	
Part V: The Emblem Now	
Chapter Twenty Five	500
<i>Capricci</i> by Laurent de Commynes in the Scope of Emblematics of the Twenty-First Century	
Ojārs Spārītis	
Chapter Twenty Six	523
Emblem Studies: Achievements and Challenges	
Peter M. Daly	
Chapter Twenty Seven.....	533
Emblems on the Web: An Overview	
Bernard Deschamps	
Works Cited.....	549
Contributors	595
Index	603



Frontispiece: *The Trusty Servant, with a View of Winchester College*. Unknown artist, oil on canvas, c.1800. Courtesy of the Warden and Fellows of Winchester College.

FOREWORD

FROM THE HEADMASTER OF WINCHESTER COLLEGE

A brief survey of the subject *via* Google reveals how lively is the contemporary interest in the study of emblems: *National Emblems of Britain*, *Religious Emblems of Sikhism*, *Emblems and Symbols Protected as Intellectual Property*, *The Study and Digitisation of Italian Emblems*, *Resident Evil 5 Badge of Honour Achievement*, *Robert Louis Stevenson's Moral Emblems*, *First Arctic Emblems*. And there are hundreds more.

There is a band of scholars worldwide whose commitment to this fascinating study of the nexus between concept and image, history and social values, communication and aesthetics, brings them together in an international conference. Emblem both unites and transcends their rich diversity; indeed, the conference itself is an emblem of a global family of scholars.

The Eighth International Conference of the Society for Emblem Studies took place at Winchester College in July 2008, the first ever in England. The College provided an ideal setting. Its ancient buildings dating from 1390, still in use for their original purpose of educating boys for service to Church and nation, are themselves an architectural emblem of an intellectual, moral and spiritual model for a civilised and robust society. The College's distinctive emblem is the figure of The Trusty Servant, which (or who) appears on the frontispiece of this book. He presided over this gathering of scholars, themselves trusty servants of their various national and cultural inheritances through their study of pictorial representations of complex and durable ideals.

It is a pleasure to commend this book as the fruit of that delightful and learned gathering.

—Ralph Townsend
Winchester College
May 2009

INTRODUCTION

The substantial book in your hands stems from a succinct e-mail I received from Michael Bath in May 2005. In it, Professor Bath, then Chairman of the Society for Emblem Studies, asked whether I would be willing to organize and host the eighth triennial conference of the Society at King's College School, my professional base at the time. With London's many attractions, a conference at King's carried obvious appeal. In 2005 Professor Bath was working closely with curators from the Victoria and Albert Museum on emblematic needlework fashioned by Mary Stuart. Discussions were afoot with the V & A concerning an exhibition on emblems in the applied arts, talks that did not ultimately come to fruition. But in those optimistic days when the idea appeared possible, it seemed sensible to seek a metropolitan venue for a related conference. Accordingly, Michael Bath opened his address book and ran his finger down to my name. That same finger typed the e-mail inviting me to consider hosting the next conference at KCS.

Although flattered by the proposal, I felt it could not be done. The stumbling block was the dearth of affordable accommodation for delegates in Wimbledon, the locale of King's, and one of the most expensive areas of London. But as a matter of courtesy, I forwarded the request to the then Head Master of King's, Tony Evans. Mr Evans, an influential figure among Britain's independent schools, offered an immediate solution. Why not, he suggested, propose an alternative venue for the conference within the public school family? One place in particular recommended itself: Winchester College. This historic institution offered obvious attractions, not least its beautiful assemblage of buildings, its romantic setting on the edge of King Alfred's ancient capital, and its remarkable collections of manuscripts and early printed books, including *emblemata*. Furthermore, Mr Evans was a former member of Common Room at Winchester, and one of the twelve Fellows of the College. His suggestion that Winchester should offer its facilities for an emblem conference was met with enthusiastic assent by Sir Andrew Large, the College Warden.

The conference was duly opened by Dr Ralph Townsend, Headmaster of Winchester College, on 28th July 2008 and ran for a week. During that time some 120 delegates from twenty-four countries enjoyed in excess of eighty papers and four plenary lectures across twenty-eight sessions. There

were also two day-excursions to places of historic interest in Hampshire and Wiltshire, and receptions each evening, variously hosted by Winchester College, publishing houses, the Centre for Emblem Studies at Glasgow University, and the Chairman of Hampshire County Council - the latter in the extraordinary environment of Winchester Castle Great Hall with its fabled Round Table.

But the real endeavour of the week occurred away from the pleasurable social peripheries. The point and purpose of our gathering was played out in the hard-working sessions, and this book is testimony to the intellectual achievements of the Winchester conference. As the title of these proceedings indicates, the book offers the reader a sense of the remarkable breadth of geographical and chronological coverage surveyed by delegates, and the increasingly international scope of the subject. That this volume embraces articles examining, among many other things, the influence of Dutch emblematics in Japan, the impact of European cultural symbols among the indigenous peoples of Mexico, and the turning of British propaganda against itself in Revolutionary America, reveals how far emblem studies has come from its initial preoccupations with questions of form and national traditions. Scholars have known for many years that the study of emblems in cultural or critical isolation is impossible. For Anglophone readers, Geoffrey Whitney's *Choice of Emblemes* of 1586, generally considered to be the first printed book of English emblems, is diminished without knowledge of Andrea Alciato, Hadrianus Junius, Joannes Sambucus, Claude Paradin, and Georgette de Montenay, respectively representatives of Italian, Dutch, Hungarian, and French humanism. The way emblem books often transcended national and confessional boundaries is one of the fascinations of the subject, and the very porousness of the emblem as an artistic form made it a tool of intra- and international discourse in its centuries of cultural valency.

This is a theme that emerges again and again in the pages that follow. The authors map the intricate webs of connection between visual and verbal ideas as they weave back and forth across Europe and out along the trade and missionary routes of the early modern world. We see notions nurtured in antiquity adopted by emerging national cultures and given new vitality in fresh terrain. The union of image and inscription on the coins of Ancient Rome is seen to be received with great cultural reverence by humanists of the Renaissance and emulated as a model of compressed utterance. An admiration for condensed, cryptic wisdom finds expression in the Renaissance medal, and in the collecting and coining of *sententia* and *adagia*. This renewed interest in the epigram, a form instinct with profundity, (if not always, as John Manning points out, pudicity), created

an intellectual climate wherein the eminent lawyer Andrea Alciato might spend the Saturnalian days of 1522 composing a little book of epigrams he called “emblems”. But as some of the papers that follow testify, Alciato was not creating a hybrid form *ex nihilo*: the essential conjunction of word and image that became so ubiquitous in the centuries succeeding the publication of *Emblematum liber* in February 1531 took its cues from several pre-existing sources, not least other printed books, the reverse of the medal, and humanist epigrammatic culture.

The flexibility and transferability of the emblem proved to be its strength. With its etymological roots in a Ciceronian word meaning something that can be detached and re-attached, the emblem proved sympathetic and serviceable to all kinds of cultural environments beyond the rarefied academic circles graced by its *pater et princeps*. Thus it is we find it taken up with relish and rigour by religious parties, not least the proselytizing Jesuits, but also by Lutherans, Anglicans, and even iconophobic Calvinists. As Alison Saunders attests here, emblems designed for the instruction and edification of one or other confessional group were appropriated, often with little adaptation, by their direct rivals - tacit admission of shared theological or devotional ground between ostensible enemies. The emblem could be used less constructively too, to articulate political aspiration, aggression, and antagonism. In another mode it could testify to social cohesion or collective identity. Love poets could deploy the emblem as a succinct but potent vehicle for their declarations and blandishments; moralists could turn the same form into the medium for denunciation and rebuke.

And, of course, much of the material cast into the emblematic mould found voice in Latin, the boundary defying *lingua franca* of the *Respublica literaria*. That the form was framed within and flourished through a supra-national tongue contributed to the international reach of the emblem. Already in the Renaissance, abstruse theorists of the visual sign speculated that emblems had their true beginnings with the *Lingua Adamica*, traces of which survived through the hieroglyphs of the Egyptians. These holy signs, relics of the words uttered between God and Adam in the Garden of Eden, had been uncorrupted by the Confusion of Tongues, and pointed to a pattern for inherently truthful, sinless communication. A pure language of sign promised transcendence beyond the compromised babble of human speech. In some limited senses, these esoteric theories were played out in everyday practice. As humanists in the Netherlands surveyed the sign systems of the Italian academies, or Swedish noblemen contemplated the emblems of Spanish diplomats, or

English poets assimilated the ecstasies of Flemish pietists, understanding was reached across genuinely daunting confessional and political obstacles.

It is maybe not to stretch the point too far to suggest that there is a pleasing resonance with our contemporary experience in the history of the emblem book, a form born out of the technological advances of the age of printing. Just as important publishers of the Renaissance tested the limits of their new technology in the complex bimedial form of the emblem book with letterpress and woodblock, so practitioners of our newest informatics technology, the world-wide web, an entity of word and image, find the emblem an important test case of the capabilities of their medium in the transmission of early printed culture. The Renaissance emblem cannot be said to represent an earlier form of world-wide web; but it did, at least, amount to a network—though often, admittedly, a tangle—of semiotic markers, signs, cognizances, devices, conceits and enigmas readable by some from Europe—including the Baltic margins—, the Mesoamerican world, and those close to the missionary outposts of Africa and Asia. It should thus be seen as part of an intricate epistemological nexus which accommodated assimilation and adaptation. What had begun with Alciato as a species of coterie epigram had so expanded and evolved that the Victorian emblemist G.S. Cautley felt it not implausible to claim that he could discern “Emblems Everywhere.”

It is a pleasant task for me to thank many people for their invaluable help with the planning and running of the Winchester conference, and for the preparation of this book for the press. Instrumental in facilitating our efforts were Tony Evans, his colleagues among the Fellows of Winchester College, and their Headmaster, Ralph Townsend. Geoffrey Day, the Eccles Librarian at Winchester College, was a vital lynchpin between Winchester, Wimbledon and the wider world of emblem scholars, and his good advice, patient diplomacy, and unseen string-pulling were intrinsic to the success of the conference. He also curated a fine exhibition of Winchester’s emblem books that provided much stimulus for delegates. The Governing Body of King’s College School granted me sabbatical leave in the Spring of 2008 which gave me full freedom to work on the planning without anxiety; I am grateful to them and to the Head Master, Andrew Halls, for his graciousness. The intellectual direction of the conference took shape through discussions with Jean Michel Massing, Michael Bath, Arnoud Visser, and Alison Adams. Stephen Rawles managed the baffling bursarial side of the conference with admirable precision and patience. I am also indebted to Billy Grove, Mara R. Wade, Cristina Fontcuberta i Famadas, John Manning, Peter M. Daly, Alan Young, Philip Attwood, Kristen Lippincott, Charlotte Helgesson, Jacqueline

Whitaker, George Woudhuysen, Sabine Mödersheim, and Wim van Dongen. I wish to thank my former colleagues at King's for much good will and understanding, and my new colleagues at Marlborough College—not least the Master, Nicholas Sampson, and the English and History of Art departments—for their warmth of welcome. The contributors to this volume, both leading figures in the field and younger scholars at early stages of their careers, have been responsive and generous towards my editorial demands, and I thank them cordially for their punctuality and care in preparation of their texts. The editors at Cambridge Scholars Publishing have been accommodating and efficient, and I wish to commend in particular Carol Koulikourdi, Soucin Yip-Sou and Amanda Millar for their smooth and confident handling of a complicated volume. I wish to express special thanks to Sandra McKeown for accompanying me to Winchester on preparatory trips, and to Catherine McKeown—born during the planning stages of the conference—for her regular visits to the study to check up on her father's progress.

I thought it just and fitting to dedicate this collection of papers to Jean Michel Massing of King's College, Cambridge. No scholar working in the field has uncovered more emblems in more countries, from Peru to Japan, Brazil to India, or Portugal to China, than Jean Michel. Nor has anyone found emblems in more unlikely places, from itinerant preachers' flip-charts, to English inn-signs, to Edwardian gossip magazines, to American soap-powder advertisements. In sum, nobody has better claim to a book on the International Emblem than the man who has been as a life-force at conferences of the Society for Emblem Studies down through the years, and who has richly educated, entertained, and inspired us all by his depth of scholarship, appetite for knowledge, and life-affirming nonconformity.

—Simon McKeown
Marlborough College
February 2010

PART I:

**THE FORMATION OF THE RENAISSANCE
EMBLEM**

CHAPTER ONE

EMBLEMS AND THEIR CONTEXT: A GENERIC OVERVIEW

JOHN MANNING

With a few courageous and honourable exceptions, such as Peter Webb, David O. Frantz, Lynn Hunt, Paula Findlen, and my former colleague at the University of Wales, Lampeter, Gordon Williams, modern literary, cultural, and art historians have extensively air-brushed the Renaissance. This air-brushing is by no means a recent phenomenon. Let us take, almost at random, a representative example of *suppressio veri* and *suggestio falsi*: the in-many-ways-excellent work by Peter Burke, *Culture and Society in Renaissance Italy*. Antonio Panormita gets two mentions: the first concerns his difficult search for patronage, the second, his role as civil servant in Naples. Nowhere is mentioned his real claim to fame in his own day, and the reason he is chiefly remembered now: his authorship of the witty, learned, and obscene poem, the *Hermaphroditus*. There are eight references to Pope Pius II (Aeneas Silvius de Piccolomini [1405-1464]): all concern the *pius* and none the Aeneas. We are told nothing of the learned humanist author of countless, often obscene epigrams, nothing of the 2,000-line poem, *Nymphiplexis*, nothing of his often reprinted novella, *Euryalus and Lucretia* (first edition: Rome, 1475), nor is there any mention of his *Epistola de amoris remedio* and *Amoris illiciti medela in effigiem Amoris*. Burke mentions Poggio Bracciolini eight times, but there is nothing concerning the coarse and crude *Facetiae* (first edition: Rome, 1470), which made his name then and now. Alexander VI, the Borgia Pope, Burke refers to once. Needless to say, this does not commemorate the irregularities of his ménage, nor the extraordinary copulation tournament that he organized as an entertainment.¹ I could go on to detail other instances of *suppressiones*. My argument is that such a consistent omission of difficult facts amounts to *suggestiones falsi*, a misrepresentation of the culture under discussion.

In Burke's account, and those like it, it is the Savonarolas of the Renaissance that set the tone of the discussion, the censors, the editors, the burners of vanities. And such we find to be the case in emblem studies. If this did not begin with the Reverend Henry Green, then it found its most influential statement with him. Many scholars' first introduction to Andrea Alciato's books of emblems was through Henry Green's bibliography. It was to him I first turned. All scholars in the field owe a debt to his labours, notwithstanding his manifest flaws and errors. And to one of his flaws and errors I now ungraciously wish to turn.

Figure 1.1 presents what Green termed, Alciato's "obscene" emblem.² Let me quote Moffitt's translation of Alciato's epigram:

It is quite shocking to relate, but even more is it a foul deed whenever anyone chooses to dump the burden of his bowels into a food bowl. This act stands for all offences exceeding the canonic measure of sacred law, just as when one is willingly defiled by sexual pollution, incest and adultery.³

One might quibble over some of this, but this translation makes evidently plain the issues involved.

The nineteenth-century clergyman and bibliographer was indeed shocked, and he proclaimed this an "offensive device". Alciato's epigrams, as first conceived, were intended in a spirit of fun and festive mirth. But Alciato's merry intent in this instance hit a raw nerve in the Reverend Green. Green declared, describing the posthumous edition of the *Emblemata*, published in Lyons by Rouillé and Bonhomme in 1550, that the publishers omitted this emblem, "because of its grossness".⁴ He goes on to say that none of the following editions contained this emblem "until in 1621 Tozzius of Padua most inadvisedly restored the blot". Nowhere, however, is it evident that Rouillé and Bonhomme had moral scruples, which would prevent them including this emblem. After all, they had published the emblem before, both in Alciato's original Latin and in Aneau's French translation, where it appears as "Contre les bougres". Green omits any mention of these inconvenient facts. He also misleads the reader by stating that no following edition included this emblem until 1621. This is simply not true. In fact, it appears in many editions published before 1621. "Out damned blot," would seem to be the Reverend's cry, and he did his best to suppress it.

The Reverend Green nowhere specified the nature of the objectionable "grossness" he detected and why he found the emblem so distasteful. We might guess: scatology? Homoeroticism? Sexuality (willing "sexual pollution, incest and adultery", as the translation cited above puts it)?

Perhaps all of the above? The graphic crudity of the illustration in both the Venice 1545 edition (sig. 26v) from the press of the Aldi's and Thuilus's 1621 edition (353) might possibly have offended him. Or the gross humour and verbal coarseness of the Latin (reminiscent, oh horror, of the licentious epigrams of Martial!) may have raised a blush to his modest cheek. But we simply do not know. His condemnation is so wide-sweeping and, therefore, consequently vague. What we know for certain is that Green's complaints against this particular emblem made it more famous to later readers than it might otherwise have been.

In this essay I hope to show that there may have been reasons why Green might have viewed this emblem as "offensive", and they involve his nineteenth-century conception of what an "emblem" should be. Although the "offensive device" did cause embarrassment to some, but by no means all, of Alciato's subsequent sixteenth- and seventeenth-century commentators, it was far from being the only one that did. Illustrative crudity, gross humour, verbal coarseness and obscenities involving sexuality, scatology, and homoeroticism can all be found in other of Alciato's emblems and in those of his immediate imitators and successors in the genre.

As Heckscher and Manning have pointed out, editions of Alciato's *Emblemata* in his own and later centuries found ways of including *Adversum naturam peccantes* in vernacular translations, in the original Latin, and with and without cuts. Nor should we necessarily infer that there was an act of censorship involved in presenting this particular emblem without an accompanying woodcut or engraving. It was not uncommon for particular emblems within an edition of the *Emblemata* to appear as *emblemata nuda*. Complete editions of the text would appear as part of Alciato's *Opera omnia* without accompanying illustrations. Readers of this paper should refer to Heckscher and Manning for detailed instances and examples, but to summarize in broad outline the book-history of this emblem: editors sometimes worked the emblem into appendices, termed, somewhat disingenuously, *Notae posteriores*. We should not necessarily impute this to embarrassment. The publisher may only have wished to preserve the sequence of the *Emblemata omnia* that had been laid down previously in earlier editions. In support of this anti-censorship argument I would point to the fact that, like every other book in the period, Alciato's *Emblemata* had to appear "cum privilegio", with the approval of the censor. The title page of the volume containing the first printing of the device and its accompanying woodcut proudly announces that Pope Paul III granted the *privilegium* and states that the book appeared with the approval of the State of Venice. Many subsequent

editions that include the “offensive” emblem contain a statement that there is nothing contrary to religious doctrine within the volume. Sometimes this appeared on the very page facing the text of Alciato’s so-called “offensive emblem”. We have a quantity of bibliographical evidence in front of our modern eyes that contradicts the Reverend Green’s statement concerning the Rouillé/Bonhomme and Thuilius editions. Why, we have to ask, did Green get it so wrong? Or rather, why did he go to such lengths to misrepresent Alciato’s book of emblems and its publishing history?

The question becomes more curious when we consider Green’s inconsistent stance towards this material. We have recorded above his misrepresentation of the bibliographical evidence in his description of the posthumous edition of the *Emblemata*. However, Green himself will reproduce in facsimile the “offensive device” in his *Andreae Alciati Emblemata Fontes Quatuor*. Nor could he reasonably do otherwise, given his scholarly decision to reprint the Aldine, Venice 1546 edition as one of the *fontes* of Alciato’s *Emblemata*. *Adversum naturam peccantes* is listed alphabetically in Green’s “The Mottoes and Titles in the whole of Alciati’s Emblems”, but it appears without an assigned number.⁵ He puts it in, and takes it out again. It is a simple case of “now you see it, now you don’t.” Green’s bibliographical conjuring trick is not uncommon in the impure arts of Victorian “bibliography”. We need only look at Jannet or “Pisanus Fraxi” (Henry Spencer Ashbee?) or the pseudonymous “Speculator Morum”: the *Bibliotheca scatologica*, the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*; the *Centuria Librorum Absconditorum*, the *Catena Librorum Tacendorum*, the *Bibliotheca Arcana*. These were lists of books that were “prohibited” or which could “not be talked about”, “secretly printed. Prohibited by law, seized, anathematized, burned or Bowdlerized”. Green’s near contemporary practitioners in the bibliophilic art hid salacious material and revealed it at the same time. It, too, was a conjuring trick. These books were published in privately-printed, limited, and therefore expensive editions, behind the carapace of scholarship. A smattering of Latin served to hide a multitude of inky sins, “blot[s]” as Green so aptly might call them. In the nineteenth-century those who had not received the somewhat dubious benefits of a classical education, women, the lower classes, young children, had to be protected by recourse to a language they had never been taught and could not understand. The obscene publications act of 1867 prohibited the sale of works designed “to deprave and corrupt”. Those who could read Latin and Greek were probably already considered sufficiently corrupted and depraved for these tomes to be placed in their hands.

The tenets of modern psychoanalysis and literary theory, though, suggest that the Reverend Green's problem with this particular emblem and his textual inconsistencies in dealing with it may stem from deep-seated anxieties and difficulties, either in him or in his culture. It betrays an almost prurient titillation with its "grossness" amounting to a tittering, perverse pleasure. And because the pleasure is perverse, its source had to be suppressed and concealed. It is simply too simplistic to refer to received, conventional notions of "Victorian" repressive sensibilities regarding sexuality, much less to over-exaggerated modesty. In some ways, among the learned, classically educated, their attitudes towards such matters could be more robust than ours. Coming from a highly developed, classically-based Oxbridge education, Green could not have been unaware of the innuendoes in the *Emblemata* that modern scholars have often ignored. And his extreme reaction against this particular emblem may well have been coloured by such an informed awareness.

To answer our original question, let us begin with Otto Vaenius. Figure 1.2 is an engraving from *Q. Horati Flacci emblemata*.⁶ On the left hand side of the opening, on the facing page (130), are some verses from Horace's *Satires* concerning the use of riches. The engraving represents the miser, who, though living in a large, spacious house, nevertheless dresses in rags. His cellar is well stocked, his pantry full, but he feeds on a cabbage. The engraving seems at first sight no more than an illustration of Horace's text. Where, then, we might ask, is the emblem? How is this emblematic? If we look closely, out of the window above the miser's head there is a grazing ass. Perhaps this is no more than a naturalistic detail. But it is no coincidence that the grazing ass is an exact visual quotation from an Alciato emblem, "In avaros" (On misers), which depicts an ass grazing on thistles. Though it bears on its back all sorts of good things to eat, it feeds, in Moffitt's translation, "upon brambles and tough reed grass".⁷ Alciato's emblem, no less than Vaenius' text, draws on Horace. But Vaenius foregrounds the classical text and miniaturizes Alciato's emblem as an inset. However, to the discerning eye, there is an interplay between the illustration of a classical text and the framed interpretative emblem. The ass becomes an emblem rather than a naturalistic detail because of its position within a larger referential context. This is indeed an ass bearing the mysteries, an *asinus portans mysteria* in Erasmus' phrase, not unknown to Alciato himself, who used it as the basis of his Emblem 7.

What might we draw from Vaenius' instructive example? Vaenius saw the emblem as only part of a bigger picture, an inset within a larger design. Emblems, thus, should be studied within a larger intellectual, cultural, historical, geographical framework. They cannot and should not be seen as

a discrete form with no reference to a broader literary and cultural context. Seen in this way, the emblem can and did function, as it does in the Vaenius engraving, as an effective interpreter and commentator.

We need go no further than to consider Jan Van der Noot, Georgette de Montenay and Geoffrey Whitney to see that their historical context indicates how we should read their books of emblems. Van der Noot was a victim of religious persecution in the Low Countries. His emblems of worldly vanity and the transitory nature of all things offer him the dubious consolation that his trials, too, are transitory. Georgette de Montenay's book should be seen in relation to the wars of religion in France. Her apocalyptic emblems indicate that the faithful are living in a time of tribulation. Whitney was a retainer of the Earl of Leicester in the latter's campaign against the Spanish in the Low Countries and his *Choice of Emblemes* is nothing less than an aggressive apology for that campaign.

If context is important for the emblem, let us turn to the context of Alciato's emblems. Here we take a tiny step closer towards the answer to our original question relating to Henry Green's misrepresentation of Alciato. Alciato alludes in the *Emblemata* to particular historical events and persons. I do not wish to pursue this line of inquiry here, or to review the scholarship on this matter. A representative example of a study of contemporary allusion might be Peter M. Daly's article on the *Spes proxima* emblem.⁸ But what is more likely to prove helpful in solving our question regarding the Reverend Green and Alciato's emblems is the generic context of the epigram. When Alciato conceived his epigrams during the Saturnalia, according to his oft-quoted letter to Calvo, what models, what precedents, what generic context of "Saturnalian emblems" did he have in mind?⁹ What ways of reading did he invoke? Would these be relevant to Green's understanding of the emblematic epigram?

Wolfgang Harms in his plenary address to the Society for Emblem Studies at the Fifth International Conference in Munich in 1999 related the rise of the emblem to the context of the Reformation, particularly to the habits of reading fostered by the new liberty given the readers to interpret scriptures for themselves.¹⁰ Others have related Alciato's emblems to Erasmus' *Adagia*. It is evident that the emblems were conceived during the period of the erudite Medici Pope, Leo X and of Martin Luther. Given the scatological nature of Alciato's "offensive device" it might well be borne in mind that the Reformation itself, in Luther's own words, was conceived "in cloaca" (in the privy, or, more broadly, "in the shithouse"). Theological debate and diplomatic exchanges were liberally larded with excremental rhetoric. Luther's *Tischreden* (Table-Talk) was, shall we say, robust in its expression. In that context, there is nothing abnormal or exceptional in

Alciato's use of obscene scatology. His emblems too were conceived at table, "in festivis horis".

But I would like to suggest that the culture of the epigram, as we find it in Alciato, began earlier in the *quattrocento* during the pontificate of Nicholas V, the period termed "the false Renaissance". Many features of this period find echoes in the emblems of Alciato. Indeed, many of his emblems can only be rightly understood, if related to this ethos. The same context also informs Valeriano and Paolo Giovio, whose works, though not published till the 1550s, nevertheless relate to the *quattrocento* and the beginning of the *cinquecento*.

Chamberlin characterized Nicholas V's papacy in the following terms.¹¹ What he says might equally be applied to the Medici Pope, Leo X.

[S]cholars had time to spare to prospect in the great rubbish heap of the past. The search for manuscripts became an obsession ... [B]y the middle of the fifteenth century, a great part of the body of Latin learning was again in circulation. It came as a revelation to men whose minds had been conditioned over centuries to accept Christian theology as the total horizon of learning. They accorded it an almost superstitious veneration, a reverence that hitherto had been reserved solely for the Scriptures.

As we know from his notebook, *Antiquae inscriptiones veteraque monumenta patriae* (facsimile edition; Cisalpino, 1973), Alciato himself fossicked in this rubbish heap. Alciato's later emblems spring from his antiquarian interests, and invoke ancient tombs, statuary and monuments. They are a *bricolage* from the rubbish heap of antiquity. For example, take "In iuventutem", which celebrates the altar on which effigies of Apollo and Bacchus stand. The invitation they offer is the Goliardic "Gaudeamus igitur, iuvesdum sumus". Alciato's emblem celebrates the virtues of Apollo and Bacchus, metonyms for wine, poetry, and medical science, which preserve the joys of youth. He celebrates in all senses what might be termed "the good life".

Chamberlin goes on to say, "There was a reverse side of this splendid new coin of the Renaissance. Earlier popes had looked dubiously at the frankly pagan aspect of this rebirth, the adulation of the great pagan poets at the expense of the fathers of the church."¹² This was a culture that began to extol human pleasure and sensuality, and the antiquarian energies were equally directed to what were termed "obscene frivolities". Let us look more closely into this culture that Chamberlin has described.

Lorenzo Valla had mastered the tools of the new philology, and deployed them in a masterly fashion. Alciato, as a jurist and scholar, would later deploy these same tools in making sense of Roman law. In

Valla's hands, however, the new philology called all in doubt. Described as "the Voltaire of the Renaissance", his favourite literary topic, as Chamberlin describes it, was "pornography". His *De Voluptate* (On Pleasure) was, in fact, an apology for libertinism. Cleverly, his use of the debate format allows him to review the contrary virtuous position, while reviewing all sorts of sensual possibilities on the opposing side. In its mixture of virtue and vice, it is indeed obscene, and its rhetorical brilliance might have been directed to higher things. Its wit, audacious cleverness, and style were designed to amuse and to attract attention. The work, however, is in prose, not verse. Let us turn to Valla's near contemporary, a master practitioner in the art of epigram.

Antonio Panormita, needed no introduction wherever he went among the circles of the learned, because his two books of epigrams, known as the *Hermaphroditus*, had already made him more than well-known. His epigrams, like Alciato's, were written, he says, in an atmosphere of fun and laughter ("In risu et medio ... joco").¹³ Like Alciato's, they were also unpolished and discordant ("inculta et dissona"). Contrary to the opinion of some modern scholars, such as Laurence O'Toole, pornography and obscenity in the Renaissance were simply used for political ends, "to satirise, criticize, to tilt at the Church, the State, the monarchy".¹⁴ This they certainly did. But obscene epigrams of the period were also designed to arouse. Panormita plainly states in his very first epigram that the aim of his *Hermaphroditus* is to excite sexual feelings.¹⁵ This little book "would excite the member of even an Hippolytus", he boasts ("vel Hippolyto concitat inguen opus").

Hermaphroditus is a mock encomium to end (or begin) all mock encomia. It both praises and dispraises the greatest and the least of things: the prick and the cunt. In Book 1, Epigram 42 he explains to his patron:

In binas partes diduxi, Cosme, libellum,
 Nam totidem partes Hermaphroditus habet.
 Haec pars prima fuit, sequitur quae deinde secunda est.
 Haec pro pene fuit, proxima pro cunnus erit.

(Cosimo, I have divided my little book into two parts, since the Hermaphrodite also has two parts. This has been the first part, what follows next is the second. This has been the part concerning the penis, the next one will be about the cunt).¹⁶

But in dividing his work, Panormita wanted to have his pleasures both ways. "Call the book anything you like," he says, "just so long as it is

indecent.” As Alciato’s Saturnalian epigrams were composed at a time of respite from his legal labours, so were Panormita’s (Book 2, i, ll. 19-20):

Cum vacat officio legali, ludicra condo,
Dum bibo, quae nobis immeditata fluunt.

(When the legal business is left behind, while drinking, I compose humorous trifles, which flow spontaneously.)

In Book 1, Epigram 38, addressed to the erotic poet, Pontano, he excuses his own unpolished and dissonant verses, because they are composed in an atmosphere of fun and laughter. Pontano’s two books of epigrams also celebrate the pleasures of convivial friendship, good wine, merry jests, old books, and fine poetry, topics also dear to Alciato. Alciato’s meters and versification have also been described as rough, and his emblems were conceived equally at a time of festive mirth, at the Saturnalia. Choice epithets and well-turned phrases of a lascivious and suggestive nature were repeated and savoured by both authors. Panormita’s “immanem ... stomachum” concerns the penis (2, vi). It is one-eyed and blind. The vulva is voracious (2, viii) and smells. Epigram 10 likens woman to the pains of hell. Obscenities and ribald mirth are used to arouse laughter at the expense of effeminate men, critics, pedants and dullards. There is again an obvious similarity with Alciato, whose emblems deal with such topics. Panormita gives blunt, sententious advice: “clam paedico clamve fututor agas” (buggering and fucking should be done in secret) (2, xiv, 10). Alciato, too, gives blunt advice, but none as explicit as this.¹⁷

“Advice to Princes” literature came in various formats, but from Panormita and Alciato it was probably more than any Renaissance prince would care to receive. Alciato begins with a dedicatory emblem to the Duke of Milan, which deals with one of Jove’s many amours in transformed shape. Giulio Romano was to illustrate this in the erotic designs of the Palazzo del Te. Epigram 1 of the *Hermaphroditus* was dedicated to Cosimo de’ Medici. While it acknowledges that cares of state will preoccupy him for much of his time, it recommends he take leisure to peruse the author’s book of mirth-provoking, obscene epigrams. By doing so, he will set himself apart from the uncouth mob. The author follows the practice of the ancient poets, whose notebooks were full of obscenities. Their authority, not that of the Christian Church, is invoked. The ignorant will criticize his jests, but the learned will commend him. Alciato’s emblematic epigrams were designed for just such an audience.