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The Emblem in Early Modern Europe: Contributions to the Theory of the Emblem, written by Peter M. Daly

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Journal Title: Journal of Jesuit Studies

Volume: Volume 2, Number 3

Publisher: Brill | 2015-12-26, Pages 471-480

Type of Work: Article | Final Publisher PDF

Publisher DOI: 10.1163/22141332-00203005

Permanent URL: <http://pid.emory.edu/ark:/25593/wb7nx>

Final published version:

https://brill.com/view/journals/jjs/2/3/article-p471_5.xml

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Accessed April 26, 2025 3:36 AM EDT

Book Reviews



Peter M. Daly

The Emblem in Early Modern Europe: Contributions to the Theory of the Emblem.
Farnham, SU and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014. Pp. i–xii + 234. Hb, £63.

This volume of essays by the great emblem scholar and bibliographer Peter Daly centers on questions of emblematic construction and interpretation: simply put, “how emblems were actually read” (3) by their early modern audiences. Concomitantly, he explores the theoretical implications of the various plausible responses provided in the book’s ten chapters. Along the way, Daly astutely summarizes the state of the field on a number of important topics: the historiography of emblem studies in the twentieth century, extending from Mario Praz’s *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1939; 2nd ed., London: Warburg Institute, 1964) and William Heckscher and Karl-August Wirth’s *Emblem, Emblembuch* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1959) to Rosemary Freeman’s *English Emblem Books* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948) and Albrecht Schöne’s introduction of *Emblemata: Handbuch zur Sinnbildkunst des XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1967); the contested status of the *emblem triplex*, comprising an *inscriptio* (either titular or in the form of a motto), a *pictura* (usually pictorial, though sometimes exclusively verbal), and a *subscriptio* (often but not always epigrammatic), the tripartite format of which proves anything but prescriptive for the history of the emblem; the argumentative and hermeneutic relation amongst the emblem’s textual and pictorial parts, whose mutual interaction leaves open the issue of semantic priority; and, of special significance to readers of this journal, the pastoral and/or political functions of the various types of emblem book produced by Jesuit authors, both individual and corporate, between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.

Daly’s observations about the meanings of emblems and how such meanings were discerned require close examination, since he tends to embed them within the fabric of the ten chapters. The reader must sift and collate the conclusions drawn from the historical evidence. (In this respect, one might argue

that *The Emblem in Early Modern Europe* is itself emblematic, in making its case by licensing the reader actively to rehearse the author's arguments.) Take the crucial issue of semantic univalence. Daly repeatedly invokes Georg Philipp Harsdörffer's *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* (Nuremberg: Wolfgang Endters, 1644–49), which explicitly distinguishes between the variable significance—the *Sinn*—of multivalent visual motifs, such as the eagle or the serpent, and the univalent meaning of the emblem as a whole, discernible from the sum total of compatible *Sinne*, bodied forth by the emblematic motifs. The problem lies in choosing each motif's correct *Sinn*: since emblems often presume prior knowledge of these *Sinne*, rather than explicating them, their “interpretation is frequently doubtful, and, as was said earlier of lions, it can be good or evil. The snake is an image of cleverness, poisonous slander, and when it has its tail in its mouth, it is a representation of eternity” (62, quoted from *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* VII, 98). The reader-viewer will know that “in a given emblem only one meaning is usually intended” (62), but distilling that meaning from the multiple meanings inherent in the component motifs can be challenging, as Harsdörffer readily admits: “one cannot judge an emblem, unless one has earlier thoroughly learned the nature and qualities of the figure, which are often hidden and cannot be depicted, hence the meaning of the emblem is difficult and dark” (128, quoted from *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* IV, 244). Daly cites Harsdörffer so frequently that his theory of the emblem, which is in fact a theory of the *figura*, comes to appear normative, the standard against which other theories are implicitly measured. In the chapter “Are Emblem *Inscriptiones* always *Mottoes*?” for instance, Daly apparently agrees with Harsdörffer's notion that most emblems, as opposed to their variable motifs, harbor a single or at least principal meaning: whether emblematic *inscriptiones* take the form of titular *lemmata* or mottoes, they “assist in understanding the emblem as a whole” (132), and moreover, “any *inscriptio* [...] is likely to suggest the general direction of meaning of a given emblem, and by emblem I mean visual images and text(s), which any reader will have before him or her” (133). In reading such emblems, the historicist scholar, following Harsdörffer's model, must search for the unifying meaning comprised by motivic multiplicity.

It is very much to Daly's credit that even while calling attention to the leading function of *inscriptiones*, he battles mightily against Wolfgang Neuber's ascription of semantic preeminence to an emblem's textual component—specifically, its *lemma*, which Neuber construes as necessarily a motto in his influential essay “Locus, Lemma, Motto. Entwurf zu einer mnemonischen Emblematiktheorie” (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993). He disagrees with Neuber on two grounds. First, text could not be solely constitutive of an emblem's other elements, visual or verbal, since the mode of production was notably

composite. The publisher usually commissioned the pictures, often independently of the author who had penned the *inscriptiones*. The *subscriptiones* sometimes evoke a visual image that aligns with the *inscriptio*, producing the *imago* verbally; alternatively, the *scriptio* can respond to the pictorial *imago* supplied by the publisher (this is true of the four famous emblem books composed by the Jesuit Jan David). A third possibility might be that the *scriptio* dwell on the puzzling relation between the textual *inscriptio* and the pictorial *imago*. Or, in yet another permutation, the *scriptio* can posit a verbal *imago* that is meant to operate alongside a pictorial *imago* interpolated ex post facto. These numerous variations speak to the fact that the verbal and visual constituents of the emblem were as dynamic and interactive as its mode of production was complexly contingent. Daly once again cites Harsdörffer, who describes “six different ways of organizing a ‘conversation game of emblems,’” amongst which choosing a picture and inventing a motto are considered no less viable than choosing a motto and inventing a picture. Harsdörffer, concludes Daly, enumerates “different ways of creating emblems, different starting points and not all of them textual, let alone mottoes” (117, quoted from *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* I, 50–51). Nor does the *inscriptio* or *scriptio* determine the process of interpretation: whereas the *inscriptio* merely “suggests a direction of interpretation,” the *scriptio* will normally respond or elaborate upon “aspects of the main motif either or both in the *pictura* and *scriptio*, which may be stated or implied, and this part of the emblem will elucidate interpretation and application” (95). Second, Neuber’s notion of authorship elides the circumstances of the emblem’s textual creation with the circumstances of its jointly visual and verbal reception by a reader-viewer. The emblem scholar, warns Daly, must strive to keep these things apart:

It seems to me that any modern scholar who desires to suggest a newer description of the genre of the emblem needs at the very outset to distinguish between reception and creation [...]. Creation may be something of a problem since the writer of the emblem texts may not have either been responsible for, or even have approved of, the illustrations. The writers may perhaps never have been consulted. The role of publisher and illustrator(s) needs to be considered. The question of the primacy of text or graphic image must also be reviewed. Here again it may well be a question of creation or reception. Yet a printed emblem comprises a graphic image and two or more texts (149).

The Emblem in Early Modern Europe has many virtues, but Daly perhaps underestimates the amount of time and energy emblem enthusiasts were

willing to invest in *emblemata* within a prevailing culture of recreative, not simply recreational, *otium*. His remarks in the chapter “Mnemonics and Emblems” on how emblems were used, for example, would seem to suggest that emblematisers and their publishers generally worked within a somewhat delimited threshold of difficulty: “Probably few publishers would have printed emblem books if they had required hard work in the reading. Many earlier emblem writers, including Alciato, insist that their emblems were the result of leisure activity” (97). But take as a counter-example an emblem on the Society of Jesus and its embrace of evangelical love, from the *Imago primi saeculi*, published by the Flemish-Belgian Province in 1640 to celebrate the order’s centenary (Figure 1). The *titulus* identifies the emblem in toto, both its engraved picture and typographical texts, as a *symbolum*, “symbolic image,” of the Society of Jesus, dedicated to the “greater glory of God.” The Latin *lemma* and epigram follow an *inscriptio* and *subscriptio* in Hebrew. The *lemma* reads, “This is the purpose of vows.” The term *vota* signifies not only vows, but also wishes, in the sense of ejaculations and prayers of supplication. The picture depicts a personification of the Jesuit *anima*, her arms devoutly crossed, from whose heart these vows shoot upward, emerging like arrows aimed at the radiant tetragrammaton, which in turn encodes, as Jesuits such as Jerónimo Nadal had argued, the letters of the Holy Name of Jesus. The resemblance between the *anima* and the Virgin constitutes a tacit acknowledgment, rendered pictorially not verbally, that Mary is the order’s mediatrix and co-sponsor. This Marian analogy also implies that just as she is conjoined eternally with Jesus as his spiritual bride, so the *Societas Jesu* strives ever to be united with its spiritual bridegroom.

The subscription opens by apostrophizing the heart of the Jesuit votary: “Wherefore, my heart, do you cast [your] vows at that great name?” These vows, pictured as sharply pointed arrows, are to be reimagined as guidelines, securing the heavenward passage of one’s fellow Jesuits, and then as flames emanating from one’s fiery, loving heart, which is likened visually to the Marian *anima*: “You wish that it be granted your comrade to go to that place. Go forth, you sacred flames: mine is no counterfeit fire; these arrows fly, having been released from the virginal quiver.” And, having enflamed his fellow Jesuits with love for the Holy Name, the votary now visualizes how the whole world catches fire, burning with love of God and one’s fellows, until the entire globe has been set ablaze and the dignity of the Holy Name universally augmented: “In order that these sacred flames ignite one’s comrades, and this Name sets fire to the sun’s two houses [i.e., the earth’s two hemispheres], and this conflagration illuminates the world with eternal light, and the holy dignity of that Name is thereafter increased.”



FIGURE 1 Emblem Forty-Four, "Societas Iesu Symbolum Ad Maiorem Dei Glorian," in Johannes Bollandus, Jan de Tollenaere, et al., *Imago primi saeculi Societatis Iesu* (Antwerp: Ex Officina Plantiniana Balthasari Moreti, 1640).

Reading the mutually referential picture, inscription, and epigram is neither simple nor straightforward, but rather quite labor-intensive. The pictorial image reads the texts, layering them with bridal imagery borrowed from Marian exegesis of the Song of Songs. Conversely, the texts read the picture, construing the arrow-like *vota* as “true flames” (“non adulter”), their trajectories as lines of fire having the power to ignite the world in which the Marian *anima* fervently prays. Love for one’s fellow Jesuits is envisaged as the mimetic spark that sets the Society alight, inspiring its members to imitate one another, and causing them to enkindle ejaculatory *vota* as the first step in a process of evangelization that ineluctably expands into a universal conflagration.

Jesuit emblematisers, as is well known, were very alert to the ways pictorial images can inflect verbal ones, and vice versa. In this respect, they were responding to the heightened presence of the *pictura* in many Humanist emblems embellished by publishers with detailed woodcuts or engravings. In the 1621 edition of Andrea Alciato’s *Emblemata*, to cite one example, emblem 197, “On the Statue of Modesty,” incorporates a picture of Penelope seated between her youthful suitor Ulysses and her father Icarus, king of Sparta, from whom she modestly veils her face (Figure 2). The *subscriptio* explains that the demure Penelope, caught between love for Ulysses and duty to her father, used the action of self-veiling to reveal silently whom she preferred. Icarus, having discerned the significance of Penelope’s gesture, commemorated it by erecting an altar statue of the goddess Pudor in the likeness of his daughter (“Hocque Pudori aram schemate constituit.”). In the various illustrated editions of Alciato’s *Emblematum liber*, the attentive Icarus is shown reacting knowingly to Penelope, whose attitude will inspire the statue he will commission. The picture complements the *titulus*, “In Pudoris statuam,” and glosses the *subscriptio*, emphasizing that the emblem is about the power of visual discernment to propagate images of virtue. Indeed, the *pictura* may itself be construed as an image of one such image, for the status of the figure of Penelope is ambiguous; she functions at one and the same time as the protagonist of the story and as the prosopoeic effigy.

In another example, emblem twenty-four, “More than the Transformation of Diomedes and Glaucus,” in the 1599 edition of Johannes Sambucus’s *Emblemata*, the pictorial image operates as the hinge that mediates between the verbal imagery of the motto and that of the epigram (Figure 3). The reference to Diomedes and Glaucus, taken from *Iliad* 11.876–77, epitomizes the conversion of enmity into friendship: the Greek Diomedes and Trojan Glaucus resolve to put down their weapons and become friends, upon learning that Oeneus, the former’s grandfather, had been a close friend to Bellerophon, the latter’s ancestor. The *pictura*, by contrast, shows a scholar and a peasant

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Andreae Alciati.

In Pudoris statuam.

EMBLEMA CXCVII.



PENELOPE desponsa sequi cupiebat Vlysem,
 Ni secus Icarus malleo habere pater.
 Ille Ithacam, hic offert Sparten: manet anxia virgo:
 Hinc pater, inde viri mutuus urget amor.
 Ergo sedens velat vultus, obnubit ocellos:
 Ista verecundi signa pudoris erant.
 Quis sibi pralatum Icarus cognovit Vlysem,
 Hocq; Pudori aram schemate constituit.

COMMENTARI I.

I. SEDET honesta matrona in medio duorum virorum, hinc senis Icarij, in de iuuenis Vlyffis, & ad Vlyffem conuersa velo faciem tegere parat. Statuam pudoris nobis nummi vetusti representant. In nummo, cuius inscriptio, SABINA

AVGVSTA HADRIANI AVG. ab altera parte Dea sedet velo faciem cooperata, digito dexteræ indice ad ingulum admoto, cuius inscriptio, PVDICITIA. In alio quodam Herenniae sigillum mulieris sedens cum conto in laeuam vnam iacentis.

Statua Pudoris ex nummis.

FIGURE 2 Emblem 197, "In Pudoris statuam," in Andrea Alciato, Emblematum liber (Padua: P.P. Tozium, 1621).

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FIGURE 3 Emblem Twenty-Four, "Plus quam Diomedis & Glauci permutatio," in *Emblemata*, et aliquot nummi antiqui operis (Antwerp: Ex Officina Plantinian, apud Christ. Raphelengium, 1599).

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 JOURNAL OF JESUIT STUDIES 2 (2015) 471-543
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effecting some sort of exchange; positioned between them are a harrow and armillary sphere. A king, crowned and brandishing a scepter, gallops by on horseback. The picture portrays the comparandum that the inscription characterizes as being in some sense greater: “Plus quam Diomedis & Glauci permutatio.” But it also indicates that a different kind of *permutatio* is in play, one having less to do with changeable feelings than with the transfer or transposition of attributes evincing social condition. One might put this succinctly as follows: the verbal image adduced by the inscription reads the topical head one way, the pictorial image another way. The long *subscriptio* amplifies upon the picture’s reading of “permutatio”: the scholar is identified as an astrologer, the peasant as a ploughman. The man of learning had misread the stars, falsely predicting a thunderstorm, whereas the peasant, when asked by the king when it might rain, had correctly predicted, “In twenty days.” The king, recognizing him as the better prognosticator, commanded that he be given the astrologer’s implements, thus implying that his practical knowledge trumped the other’s learning. Conversely, the inept astrologer was given the peasant’s mattock and roller. The picture provides an ironic comment on this exchange: the men’s appearance remains the same, even after their attributes change hands, implying that *permutatio*, construed as a kind of exchange, does not of necessity lead to that other species of *permutatio*, the alteration or transformation of character.

This interpretation of Sambucus’s emblem could of course be extended, not to mention inflected, but enough has been said to shore up the basic point that the emblematic *pictura* is as much an instrument of interpretative reading as the *inscriptio* or *subscriptio*. Daly would seem to endorse this point of view, as his remarks on contextualization, in the chapter “On the Interpretation of Emblems,” suggest:

I believe that interpretation should seek to contextualize. So what is the context for emblems? For an emblematic motif, that is a visual motif encountered in an emblem, it seems to me that we should take as a first context the emblem itself, all three parts—perhaps more, perhaps less—in which it appears. That would mean seeing the visual motif but also relating it to the emblem writer’s text or texts (178–79).

But *pace* Daly, more attention is paid to texts than images in *The Emblem in Early Modern Europe*. The absence of close readings of the many emblems reproduced throughout the book, produces the false impression that where meaning is concerned, *tituli*, *lemmata*, *inscriptiones*, *subscriptiones*, *epigrammata*, and *commentaria* somehow have the upper hand.

Let me close by briefly discussing Daly's final chapter, "Jesuit Emblems: In the Service of God, Man, or the Society of Jesus?" He states, almost at the outset, that the "prime purpose served by Jesuits in their emblematic publications was religious or spiritual" (193). Many doubled as meditative treatises or were structured as spiritual exercises. What other functions did Jesuit emblem books fulfill? Daly, co-compiler with G. Richard Dimler, S.J., of the indispensable *Corpus librorum emblematum: The Jesuit Series* (Toronto & Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1997–2007), is better placed than most to answer this question, and accordingly, he makes many valuable observations here. He points out, for instance, that surprisingly few Jesuit collections of saints' lives were emblematically illustrated, and that the same is true, again surprisingly, of books commemorating the completion of major architectural projects. Daly's primary concern, however, is to determine whether there is a substantial corpus of Jesuit emblem books that can be regarded as overtly political. The answer seems to be no, and the books that qualify, whether ecclesiastical or secular in emphasis, were issued most frequently, as Daly astutely notes, in the Northern European provinces, such as Austria, Flanders-Belgium, Gallo-Belgium, Poland, Upper Germany, and the Upper Rhine. In particular, he supplies an excellent survey of such books produced in Bavaria, amongst which emblematic funeral exequies by Andreas Brunner, Johann Wazin, Ernst Bidermann, and others predominate. Occasionally, the province itself, rather than one of its members, claimed authorship. The conclusion Daly draws—that political emblem books of this sort were few and far between—carries weight because his familiarity with the material is so vast, his control over it so magisterial.

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DOI 10.1163/22141332-00203005-01