

Literature in the Light of the Emblem: Structural Parallels between the Emblem and Literature in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, by Peter M. Daly. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979. Pp. xiv, 245. \$17.50.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries over six hundred writers produced well over two thousand books of emblems, consisting of calculatedly symbolic woodcuts or engravings of all sorts of persons, objects, and scenes, each illustration usually accompanied by a brief, more or less gnomic statement (the *inscriptio*) and a longer commentary, often in verse (the *subscriptio*). Emblems more often than not presented the reader with enigmas, which scholarly explanations have sometimes compounded rather than resolved. Mystery addicts could hardly dream up anything more satisfying than the emblems, which exploit every kind of scientific, philosophical, religious, and occultist lore.

Professor Daly has worked his way through a large part of the always growing scholarly literature, a good bit of it in German, on emblem books and their literary affines. The reader finds here an invaluable and up-to-date account of competing theories of what emblems are or ought to be, an elaboration of distinctions between the emblem genre and other related genres, literary and graphic, such as the epigram, hieroglyphics, the *impresa* or "device," commemorative medals, and heraldic design, and a discussion of various modes of thought and expression which feed into and out of the emblematic tradition: medieval nature symbolism, modes of biblical exegesis, and classical mythology. The author further reviews competing theories regarding the nature and relationships of the icon, the symbol, the allegorical figure, and the like.

The ultimate aim of this work is to show the complex ways in which the emblem books conditioned and were conditioned by literary expression. They generated word-emblems, a literary form in which verbal description of an emblem replaced the pictorial representation. Word-emblems are common through sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poetry in Western Europe, though inexperienced readers often fail to recognize them for what they are and bridle at what they take to be the poet's artificiality or obscurantism, as in the case of Crashaw.

Although emblematic lyric poetry forms a recognizable genre, drama proved the most emblematic of all the literary arts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, working with many emblematic images and producing emblematic characters, particularly in masques and pageants, which themselves grow out of the emblematic cast of mind. Narrative prose also develops in emblematic form, as in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* or in Germany in Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus* and even to some extent later in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.

Professor Daly notes the need for "a more complete and sophisticated theory of the emblem" in which to set his own careful work. Despite all the scholarly work on emblems extant theories are indeed not up to their subject. The emblematic mindset is no incidental phenomenon but registers a major state in the evolution of consciousness, manifesting itself not only in the belletristic writing which is the concern of the present book and in art but also in religious, didactic, social, political, and other literature, as Daly notes. One might add that it also extends beyond literature into life, where in the Roman Catholic Church devotion to the Heart of Jesus grows to maturity in an obviously emblematic milieu.

The emblematic stage of consciousness is intermediate between two worlds. It is grounded in the earlier and even pristine iconographic organization of

knowledge so well described by Frances Yates in *The Art of Memory*, but it is essentially the product of a sensibility conditioned by print. (As I have undertaken to show in *The Presence of the Word* and *Interfaces of the Word*, a new medium always reinforces the old at the very time it is utterly transforming the old.) Without print, the emblem's tightly controlled interaction of detailed pictorial representation and verbal text is not feasible on any significant scale. The emblematic mindset follows print through history: it continues today in the political cartoon, one of the most representative products of the typographically conditioned mind (conspicuous by its absence in electronic communication). Cartoons do not express or suggest multiple meanings so elaborately as emblems do, but, like emblems, they relate sensible images to one another in an intellectualized framework set up by a verbal text or texts functioning as an emblematic *inscriptio*. The forces shaping emblematic thinking course through history still. A complete theory of the emblem could lead to the end of the world. Professor Daly's work is an important milestone on a long road.

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