After Francis Yates Llull & Bruno: “The Emblematic Conceit in Giordano Bruno’s De Gli Eroici Furori and the Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences, pp 180-209. (excerpts)

Giordano Bruno uses Petrarchan conceits word images as extended literal metaphors as emblems, and in conjunction with emblems would be to relate his emblems to the history of emblem literature.

In one of its aspects the *Eroici furori* is an unillustrated emblem book and as such has, or should have, a place in the history of emblem literature. The following attempt to suggest that place must be regarded as tentative.

The vast sixteenth-century literature of emblem and device first takes its characteristic form with the Emblematum Liber (1531) of Andrea Alciati. This was one of the most influential books of the sixteenth century; it went through innumerable editions" and learned men wrote commentaries upon it. The book initiated an immense fashion for similar productions; outstanding names of emblematists in the sixteenth-century are those of Paolo Giovio, Ruscelli, Contile, but their number is legion. The fashion spread through Europe and in the seventeenth century the genre continued with unabated popularity, though now chiefly in the form of the religious emblem book, a very favourite weapon of the Jesuits.

The emblem literature, trivial though it may sometimes seem at first sight to be, is deeply rooted in the thought of the time. The Renaissance type of emblem seems to have originated in the study of Egyptian hieroglyphs by the humanists.' The hieroglyph was believed by them to be a picture with a hidden divine meaning, and since they also believed that both the Graeco-Roman and the Hebraeo-Christian traditions were indissolubly linked with Egypt, it followed that (to their minds) the study of the hieroglyphs was fundamentally a study of divine secrets. Understood in this way, the hieroglyphs became one with Catholic symbolism; the medieval allegories could be translated into hieroglyphs, and vice versa.' The emblems of Alciati and the rest were really invented hieroglyphs, expansions of the picture language which drew material from all kinds of sources, one of which was the poetry of Petrarch.

We shall now take a few examples from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century emblem books, illustrating the development of the Petrarchan emblem, in order to compare them with the emblems of the Eroici furori.

The picture of a butterfly burning itself in a flame which is to be found in Camillo Camilli's Imprese illustri (Pl. 18a) is a typical example of a plate from an Italian illustrated book of devices.' The motto 'M'è piu grato it morir the it viver senza', that is 'I would rather die than live without it', is taken, as Camilli points out in his commentary, from Petrarch." Petrarch, says Camilli, meant by this image of the butterfly and the flame that he died in his mistress's presence, but nevertheless felt such sweetness in this that he preferred it to remaining alive in her absence. But in this emblem or device the flame means science for which the bearer of the device renounces all pleasure and eats up his life, yet feels a secret delight in doing this.

This is an example of how emblematists drew on Petrarch as a source of 'potential emblems'." The butterfly and flame image is a very common one in the emblem books.'

Turning now to the Eroici furori, we find the following:

What is the meaning of that butterfly which flutters round the flame, and almost burns itself? and what means that legend, 'Hostis non hostis?'

Reading this after looking at the example of an illustrated emblem from Camilli one understands how true it is to describe the Eroici furori as an 'unillustrated emblem book'. Bruno in these words places before the reader an imaginary illustration, and, in this case, one which would be very familiar to those well versed in the emblem literature.' In the commentary he explains the meaning with which he is using the image."

Several of the devices in Ruscelli's collection are based on Petrarch. For example, the one which shows an eagle gazing at the sun (P1. :18b) with the motto 'Chi mi puo far di vera gloria lieta,' That which (that is, the sun) can make me happy with true glory,' is according to Ruscelli, a modification of the 'sacred precept of Petrarch' which he quotes thus:

Tien pur gli occhi qual'Aquila in quel Sole, Che ti puó far d'eterna gloria degno

(Keep your eyes fixed, like the Eagle, on that Sun which can make you worthy of true glory.)

A large number of the conventional sonnet images are used by Bruno in this way, that is to say as emblems of mystical experience. Yet if the poetry of the *Eroici furori* were to be printed by itself, without the prose emblems and the explanatory prose commentaries, we should have what would appear to be a kind of sonnet sequence (although not all the verses are in sonnet form), very obscure and difficult to follow, yet highly conventional in the conceits and images which it uses.

In the dedication to Sidney of the *Eroici furori*," Bruno is at pains to impress fully upon Sidney and his other readers what he is doing. This dedication opens with a violent attack on Petrarchism in the sense of worship of some human mistress, or, as he puts it, of 'distilling the elixir of the brain' in conceits which display to the public view the tortures and torments suffered under the tyranny of an unworthy object, that is of a human and not a divine object.' His own poetry, so he explains to Sidney, is concerned solely with the divine. In fact he had intended to make this quite clear by entitling his book a canticle, for its meaning is the same as that of Solomon's poem, 'which under cover of ordinary loves and affections contains similar divine and heroic enthusiasms'. But he refrained from giving it this title for two reasons. First, the fear of censure.' And second because there is an external dissimilarity between the form of the Song of Songs and these *Eroici furori* 'although the same mystery, the same substance of soul, is shadowed forth within them both:

For in the one case the figures of speech are openly and manifestly but figures, and the metaphorical sense is known, so that it is undeniably metaphorical when thou hearest of those dove's eyes, that neck like a tower, that tongue under which is milk, that fragrance of incense, those teeth like a flock of sheep which come up from the washing, that hair which is like a flock of goats that appear from Mount Gilead;" but this poem does not present an appearance which thus obviously urges thee to seek a latent and occult meaning, for in it are

used ordinary modes of speech and similitudes more accommodated to common sense, such as witty lovers generally use and well-known poets are accustomed to put into verse and rhyme, with sentiments such as are used by those who speak of Citherea, or Licoris, of Doris, Cynthia, Lesbia, Corinna, Laura, and others. Whence each reader might easily be persuaded that my fundamental meaning and primary intention was addressed to an ordinary love, who had dictated to me such conceits; which love afterwards, by force of disdain, had taken to itself wings and become heroic; as it is possible to convert any fable, romance, dream, or prophetic enigma, and to transfer it, by virtue of metaphor and a pretext of allegory, into the significance of anything that may please a mind which has an aptitude for wresting sentiments to any meaning, and of making everything out of everything, since all is in all, as the profound Anaxagoras says. But though he may think what he will and what pleases him, in the end each reader, whether he likes it or not, ought in justice to understand and define this matter as I myself understand and define it, and not force me to understand and define it as he thinks fit: for as the enthusiasms of that wise Hebrew have their own modes, orders, and titles which no one can understand or better declare than he himself, if he were present; so these Canticles have their proper title, order, and mode, which no one can better make plain and understand than I myself, when I am not absent.

One might perhaps express in other words the difference in form between his poetry and that of Solomon which Bruno is here describing by saying that it is the difference between an *allegorical* and an *emblematic* mode of speech. The allegorical mode, by its very strangeness and unnaturalness, will not allow the mind to rest in it without seeking a further explanation. But the emblematic mode may lull the reader into taking it at its face value.

It would be valuable to compare the medieval commentaries on the Canticle with Bruno's commentaries on his poems — a task not impossible since in three instances he points out in detail which passages of the Canticle correspond to which passages of the *Eroici furori*. For example, his third dialogue, he says, shows the force of the will beginning to conquer in the spiritual conflict and corresponds to those verses of the Canticle which speak of the winter being past and the rainy season over. (Song of Songs, II, 10-12. The other two parallels which he mentions (Op. ital. , II, p. 318) are between Song of Songs, II, 9 (En ipse stat post parietem nostrum . . .) which, he says, corresponds to his imagery of Parnassus, the Muses, and the fountain; and Song of Songs, I, 5 (Noll mirari, quia nigra sum . . .) which corresponds to his description of the civil war which arises in the soul against the determination of the spirit to follow the highest good.)….

This device and its meaning is characteristic of Ruscelli's treatment of Petrarchan emblems. The sense is mainly religious but at the same time it retains human undertones. Ruscelli has the humanist and courtly respect for the ideal type of human love as in itself already half divine and is without Bruno's 'anti-Petrarchist' spirit which demands an entirely abstract use of the Petrarchan emblem. It is in this respect that Bruno's emblems look forward to the seventeenth century. Their technique is that of Ruscelli and the whole sixteenth-century literature of emblem and device; but in spirit they belong to the baroque rather than to the Renaissance.

In the early seventeenth century emblem books there is a split between the 'profane' and the 'sacred' uses of the love conceit." One of the most striking examples of this is to be found in the two emblem books of Otto van Veen, or Vaenius, published at Antwerp in 16o8 and 1615 respectively. The first is a book of 'profane' love emblems which gives vivid pictorial presentations of the conceits so familiar to us from the sonnet writers. The second is a book of 'sacred' love emblems in which the

conceits are used in the service of religion. In the first set of pictures the actors in the drama are the profane Cupid, the lady, and the lover. In the second the actors have changed to Divine Love and the soul. But the conceits in which the spiritual drama is expressed are very close indeed to the 'profane' conceits.

This can best be studied by looking attentively at some examples.

One 'profane' emblem shows love being burned at the stake whilst the proud lady cruelly stirs the flames in which he suffers (Pl. 18c). Yet in the midst of his torments he turns upon the lady a humble and gentle gaze of resignation. The motto is `Ny mesme la more, and the meaning that the lover loves to suffer and even in death does not lack constancy.

The companion picture to this in the 'sacred' series shows the soul being burned at the stake whilst the executioner stirs the flames (Pl. 18d). But the soul is sustained in her torments by divine love, who clasps her hand encouragingly.

Another profane emblem shows Cupid shooting arrows at a breastplate (Pl. 19b). The motto is 'Amour passe tout' and the meaning that neither iron nor steel keeps out love's arrows.

In the sacred version the divine Cupid and the soul are seen shooting arrows at a breastplate and a shield (Pl. 19a). The meaning, of course, is the penetrating power of divine love.

Another picture in the profane series is a literal interpretation of the conceit of the darts from the lady's eyes (Pl. 19c). The lady sweeps forward in proud beauty whilst the lover lies stricken and wounded by the arrows from her eyes.

Equally literal is the presentation of the divine lover inflaming the breast of the soul with rays from his sun-like halo (P1. 19e). The soul is here pierced by the ray of divine love just as the lover in the other picture is pierced by the arrows from the eyes. The allusion to arrows is present in the sacred emblem, for the divine Cupid is fully armed with bow and quiver.

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Let us think over for a moment the resemblances and differences between Vaenius' procedure and that of Bruno. Bruno means by the eyes of the lady, divine beauty and goodness; by her pride and the torments which she inflicts on her lover, the painful processes of spiritual progress and experience; by Cupid's piercing arrows, which burn as well as pierce, the influences of the divine working upon the soul. These are the meanings which are made explicit in Vaenius's sacred

emblems. But Bruno uses the profane emblems with such meanings implicit in them. As he himself says, his language is not obviously sacred in intention, like that of the Canticle, but might be mistaken for an 'ordinary love'." Bruno's usage is thus more truly emblematic than that of Vaenius, for the sacred emblems of Vaenius are really sacred pictures, which quite obviously must have an allegorical meaning. But to use the ordinary conceit with the other meaning, as Bruno does, is to use it as a genuine emblem — that is to say, as a picture which secretly refers to something other than that which it appears on the surface to represent.

The sacred emblem book, of which the one illustrated by Vaenius is an early and striking example, was to have an enormous future in the literature of seventeenth-century devotion and became in the hands of the Jesuits an instrument of Counter Reformation propaganda. The Jesuit emblem books" are cruder in style but they carry on the same principle of applying the conceit to the sacred emblem. Take, for example, the heart pierced by an arrow from the divine lover's bow (Pl. 19d) in van Haeften's Schola cordis which is based entirely on conceits of the heart.

The same book contains an emblem of a winged heart (Pl. 20a). This is one which Bruno also uses and in a manner curiously like, though in some respects unlike, the form in which it is found years later in these Jesuit emblem books.

The emblem which Bruno describes' consists of a winged heart escaping from a cage up into the sky. On its upward flight the heart is guided by a blind Cupid. In the accompanying sonnet he uses the same imagery, except that he now addresses his heart as an escaping bird. In the commentary he explains that the cage represents the impediments to the spiritual life caused externally in a thousand different ways and internally by natural weakness. The heart is dismissed from it to more celestial surroundings, and its wings are the powers of the soul, as the Platonists describe them.' The god who guides it is Love, who has power to transform the seeker into that nature towards which he aspires. The whole episode closes with quotations from Petrarch, the Canticle, and the Psalms.

A near approach to this is to be found in one of the best known and most influential of the Jesuit emblem books, namely Herman Hugo's Pia desideri (first edition in 1624). One of his emblems (Pl. 20b) shows the soul being released from the cage of sense by divine love, with an allusion in the empty cage hanging on the tree from which a bird has just escaped to the theme of the escaping bird. This is very close indeed to Bruno's emblem, although there are certain differences. The author of Pia desideria felt the emblem of the winged heart to be so typical of his aims that he uses a winged and burning heart on his title-page (Pl. 20c).

The fact that the Eroici furori cannot be illustrated from sixteenth-century examples alone but demands also incursions into the seventeenth century suggests that its place in the history of emblem-book literature might be that of a late Renaissance anticipation of the baroque. Bruno's emblematics would appear to use the Renaissance technique of secret allusion to convey a spirit of baroque fervour. In his hands, the courtly Petrarchan 'device', with its many-sided allusions, is used in the spirit of the future — that seventeenth-century future in which the sacred emblem was to play such a dominating role in the European imagination.

It will be remembered that in outlining Bruno's methods in the *Eroici furori* the point was emphasized that he uses emblems in conjunction with poems." He describes the conceit in visual form in the emblem, and sings it in aural form in the poem. There is thus some organic connection between pictorial emblems and poetic conceits," and it follows that to place the emblems historically is also to place the sonnets. If, as we have said before, the poems of the Eroici furori were to be printed without the emblems and the commentaries, they would appear as a kind of sonnet sequence. This sonnet sequence would belong to the same climate as the emblems; that is to say, however much it might appear to be addressed to an 'ordinary love', it would in fact be a record of spiritual experience, a translation of the images of the Canticle into Petrarchan conceits used as hieroglyphs, and, historically speaking, it would reflect a moment in the late sixteenth century in which the forces of the coming age were beginning to use these images with a different spiritual accent.

But there is another side to Bruno's use of the Petrarchan conceit —and one which must be mentioned, however inadequately — and that is its connections with his philosophy.

The attitude of mind which sees the universe itself as a hieroglyph or emblem in which divine truth is hidden is profoundly characteristic of Bruno. The sun, the planets, the moon, the earth, are indirect reflections of the Godhead, enigmatic pictures with a hidden meaning. The universe is constructed on the same principle as an emblem or device; that is to say, it secretly shadows forth spiritual truths in terms of objects perceived by the senses. One seventeenth-century theorist on emblematics saw the sky as 'a vast cerulean Shield, on which skilful Nature draws what she meditates: forming heroical Devices, and mysterious and witty Symbols of her secrets'.' This attitude of mind must be realized in order to understand how it is that the sonnet conceits, as Bruno uses them, become, as it were, interchangeable with his philosophy. The witty conceits of lovers are used as emblems of spiritual truth, and therefore such emblems are merely variant ways of expressing the one divine truth which God has wittily concealed in the phenomena of the universe. Bruno's use of metaphysics is really as emblematic as his use of poetic images; hence the ease with which he modulates from the one form of expression into the other.

To Bruno, the philosopher, the painter, and the poet, are (like Shakespeare's lunatic, lover, and poet) 'of imagination all compact'. Poets and painters are both divinely inspired in thinking out something which is presented to them; therefore 'philosophers are in some measure painters and poets; poets are painters and philosophers; and painters are philosophers and poets. And therefore true poets, true painters, and true philosophers love and admire one another; for he is no philosopher who does not also compose and paint' (from the Explicatio triginta sigillorum, the work dedicated by Bruno to the Vice Chancellor of Oxford University soon after his arrival in England; see G. Bruno, Op. lat. conscripta, ed. F. Tocco and H. Vitelli, 1890, vol. II, pt 2, p. 133)

18(a) Butterfly and Flame, from Camillo Camilli, *Imprese illustri*, 1586 (pp. 189, 208)

18(b) Eagle and Sun, from G. Ruscelli, *Le imprese illustri*, 1560 (p. 187)

18(c) Martyrdom of Profane Love, from O. Vaenius, *Amorum emblemata*, 1608 (pp. 188–9, 207, 269 n. 107)

18(d) Martyrdom of Sacred Love,
from O. Vaenius, *Amoris divini emblemata*, 1615 (p. 188)

18(e) Divine Love raising the Soul,
from Vaenius, *Amoris divini emblemata* (p. 189)

19(a) Divine Love and the Soul shooting, from Vaenius, *Amoris divini emblemata* (p. 189)

19(b) Profane Love shooting, from Vaenius, *Amorum emblemata* (p. 188)

19(c) The Wounded Lover, from Vaenius, *Amorum emblemata* (pp. 189, 198, 206)

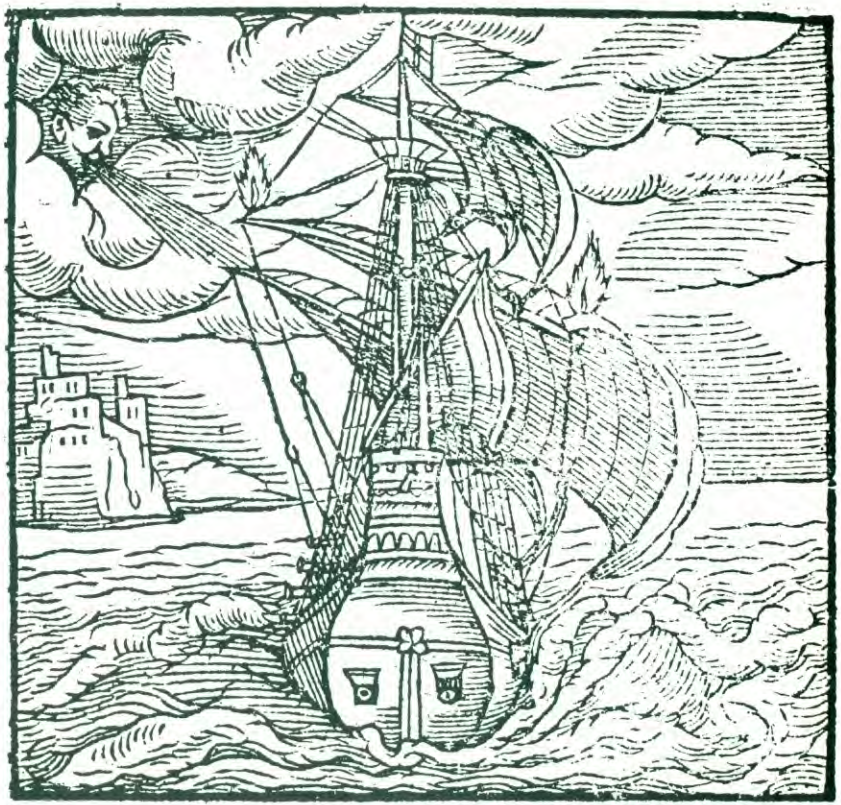
19(d) Divine Love wounding the Heart, from Harvey, *School of the Heart,* after van Haeften, 1635 (p. 190)

19(e) Divine Love inflaming the Soul, from Vaenius, *Amoris divini emblemata* (p. 189)

20(a) Winged Heart, from Harvey, *School of the Heart,* after van Haeften, 1635 (p. 190)

20(b) Divine Love releasing the Soul, from Hugo, *Pia Desideria,* 1624 (p. 190)

20(c) Winged Heart, title-page of Hugo, *Pia Desideria* (p. 190)



20(d) Ship with Flames on Sail-Yards, from Giordano Bruno, *Cena de le ceneri*, 1584 (p. 192)