

# The Theater of Emblems

## Rhetoric and the Jesuit Stage

*Bruna Filippi*

Displayed on school walls during holidays, attached to floats and triumphal arches in processions, emblems played a part in all public events organized by the Jesuits in the 17th century. These verbal-iconographic compositions, which were used to illustrate the principal themes of the ceremony, were not a mere period detail or an ornamental device but constituted a means of expression which, by virtue of the particular relations governing the association of text and image, mobilized complex rhetorical, moral, and spiritual elements simultaneously. By associating an image – seen as the “body” – with a textual element (*inscriptio et subscriptio*) – the “soul” – the emblem-maker sought to achieve a unity of meaning in which the two forms of communication complemented each other: it is precisely the way in which the two elements are connected, and the laws that regulate their composition, that constitutes the foundation of the language of the emblem. This language, which is used in a corresponding manner in a variety of other symbolic compositions (devices, hieroglyphs, symbols, coats of arms, medals, etc.), is based on the rhetorical operations of the metaphor, applied here as a model both for the word, with its mimetic properties, and for figurative codes. However, the metaphor, as a product of human ingenuity, is not only situated at the crossroads of a system of thought crystallized in a great number of inventions, but also bears witness to an ornamental aesthetic, typical of the 17th century’s aristocratic culture and social rituals. While there does exist a vast bibliography of materials on the function and role of metaphor in Baroque culture, questions nevertheless remain about the numerous cultural practices to which the Baroque gave rise and the particular processes that the 17th century brought into

play. My intention here is not to resolve all such questions but rather to provide an analytical framework by focusing my observations on emblematic compositions produced in the scholastic milieu of the Society of Jesus.

Classed somewhere between rhetorical exercise and school ceremony, the Jesuit emblematic composition enacts a whole series of procedures and situations comparable to the mechanisms of dramatic composition and theatrical convention, in which the producer's intentions are linked to the spectator's expectations. The theatrical element of these emblematic compositions is further strengthened when they are made part of Jesuit school productions, thus participating on an equal footing with dramatic language, where word and image become gesture, and gesture – with all its attributes – becomes “dramatic action.”

### The Tradition of “Learned Images”

According to Father Menestrier, the emblem “is the artifice that Poetry utilizes, with the aid of Painting, to win over the soul through the eyes.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, while emphasizing the poetic essence of this construction, the French Jesuit clearly apprehends the nature of a process that begins with an immediate perception of an image and ends with a complex rhetorical composition. Although this poetic and figurative operation was applied to a great variety of inventions, all of them based on the interlacing of image and word, the majority were intended to fulfill either a heraldic or unknown function. Their origin, which some, citing Aeschyles or Zonara, ascribed to the dawn of time, and others saw in the hieroglyphs of Horapollon,<sup>2</sup> which were brought back to Rome in 1419 by Cristoforo Buondelmonte, can in fact be ascribed to the Renaissance convergence of various learned traditions originating in the cultural practices of the Humanists. These spread across Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, becoming an object of scholarly discourse at the meetings of the various learned Academies and of discussion at court. This work, which consisted in the meticulous identification and definition of the qualities of each invention, and most importantly of what distinguished one invention from another, led to

interminable disputes among academicians, on subjects ranging from art, literature, rhetoric, philosophy, and even ethics. Dozens of books, commentaries, and dissertations on the subject were produced in Europe during this period;<sup>3</sup> and what motivated this activity was the need to compile, classify, label, and establish a canon for the composition of each hieroglyph. Even into the 17th century there was much confusion about these “learned images” (mottoes, hieroglyphs, emblems, symbols). Father Menestrier, who assigned to himself the task of turning them into “a fixed and defined Art, like the other Arts inherited from the Greeks,” came to the conclusion that their indeterminate nature was due to the fact that the Ancients had never differentiated among them, since “they made no use of either Mottoes or Coats of Arms.”<sup>4</sup>

Although the production of mottoes was cultivated in the European courts from the very beginning, it was in the sixteenth century that they enjoyed their greatest and most lavish treatment. Much of this was in connection with the spread of illustrated books, often in the form of collections of mottoes accompanied by explications of them in prose or rhyme, or even madrigals and sonnets, which met with the favor of the cultured and passionate “gentlemen” of the time. However, the evolution and aims of the genre of the emblem are not constant. For example, in 1531 the juriconsult Andrea Alciati published his collection, *Emblematum libellus*, in which each Latin proposition, in the form of a “*motto*,” is associated with a particular image and explicatory epigram. Importantly, each of these propositions is addressed to the prince, which was the case for a long time afterward, thereby limiting their reach to the court milieu and their content to an expression of its cultural values: military honor and amatory devotion. The very title of Paolo Giovio’s work, which was published in 1555 and codified the five rules of the “excellent inventor” of mottoes, confirms this tendency: *Dialogo del’imprese militari e amorose*. However, the culture of the emblem was able to break free of the closed environment of the Academies when it was integrated into pedagogical activity and even more so when, at the end of the 16th century, the first collections of sacred emblems were published. It was this use of images for the propagation of religious and didactic-pedagogical messages that allowed the Jesuits to play a pre-

ponderant role in the use of allegorical images and in the spread of the practice of emblems. Over the next two centuries, the Jesuits were responsible for the publication of over two hundred forty such works, thus constituting an important chapter in the spiritual and meditative literature born of the Counterreformation.<sup>5</sup>

These two different areas of application, chivalric and instructional, are defined in terms of the traditional distinction between "the heroic motto" and the "moral emblem," based on their inherently different natures.<sup>6</sup> Emanuele Tesauro makes an instructive distinction in his *Cannocchiale aristotelico*,<sup>7</sup> when writing of emblems which, in the minds of most, were thought of as more or less the same as mottoes. In fact, he writes, he is concerned primarily with the motto, since it "contains all the perfections of other symbols." He then goes on to point out the differences between motto and emblem: "a motto concerns a specific heroic intention: the emblem, by contrast, is a general document concerning human life."<sup>8</sup> This statement assumes the existence of completely different aims and uses for the two forms: in the motto, the expression of the concept must be of a more heroic, obscure, and ingenious nature; in the emblem, of a more simple, popular, and intelligible nature, the motto is usually engraved on the knight's shield while the emblem is either printed on canvas, displayed in drawing rooms, or shown off in the course of ceremonial activity.

A more popular, and easily comprehensible, side of the language of emblems was developed in works that carried a religious message. These were largely destined for the illiterate, who were taught the message of the church through imagery. By returning to an ancient conception of the figurative arts, in which they were viewed as an instrument of instruction for the uneducated, the Catholic Church gave new life to the use of images in devotional and evangelical activity, as well as in the struggle against various heresies. The worship of images, which had been central to the Protestant condemnation of Papist ideology and sometimes led to true iconoclastic fervor, was revived in an amendment adopted at the Council of Trent, during its twenty-fifth session, held on December 3 and 4, 1563. Sacred imagery, because it simultaneously allowed for a condensed and easy accessible experience of sacred history, was considered a basic tool in religious acculturation.

Following the deliberations at the Council of Trent, the Jesuits published a series of illustrated catechisms aimed at the illiterate and at children: by synthesizing the simple rules underlying correct living and the more complex ones governing theological questions, the Jesuits set out to spread religious instruction both to the most disadvantaged groups and to the most far-flung areas on earth. Its aim being to evangelize, the simple language of these illustrated texts was based, as in the language of emblems, on a double semantic plane: that of word and image; on the gap between the simple and univocal language of Sacred Scripture and the language of images, grounded in allusion, evocation, and symbol. This identical semantic structure can often be found in the images used to depict a saint (the term *santino*, which describes them, comes from it). In the 17th century these images enjoyed great popularity with the common people: to own one indicated one's adherence to Catholic dogma.

Although all based on the interlacing of word and image (in the final analysis, embodying a kind of audio-visual approach *ante litteram*), these variegated and multiple forms of expression enact completely differently socio-cultural aims and modes of appropriation: ranging from extremely subtle and refined mental games played out in the most cultured settings, to a simple and effective language used to educate the illiterate. Thus the Society of Jesus played a crucial role both in its educational responsibilities to society's young elite, as well as in its broader tasks of evangelisation abroad and among society's disadvantaged at home.

### Emblems and Dramatic Practice

The celebrations surrounding the canonization of Ignatius Loyola and François Xavier, held in 1622, mobilized the entire College of Rome for several days in March of that year. After the presentation of an ancient Apotheosis, the students performed two theatrical pieces, which depicted the lives of the two new Saints.<sup>9</sup>

One of these works, *Ignatio in Monseratto*, highlighted the struggle against heresy that Ignatius and the Church carried out jointly. This was illustrated by alternating and linking two separate sto-

ries: the conversion of Saint Ignatius and the realization of Pope Alessandro the Sixth's wish, expressed by him on the eve of his election to the throne of the Holy See, that evangelists be sent throughout the world in response to a premonitory dream in which he saw the world at his feet, begging for help against the enemies of the faith.

According to a version of the play printed in 1623, in conjunction with a production of it at the College of Rome, a military game called "The Gate"<sup>10</sup> is depicted in Act II, Scene III. In honor of the election of Rodrigues de Borgia, a Flemish national and Governor of Spain, to the throne of the Holy See under the name of Pope Alexander the Sixth, Spanish and Flemish knights enter into battle. This combat is carried out in military style, following the rules that the game itself requires: "not only in the way arms are handled but in the way walks are taken, as much in the ceremonies of entrance as in those of departure."<sup>11</sup>

The procession of knights is led by the *Monitor*, followed by a page carrying a motto engraved on a plaque. This first knight's motto bears a painted image of an armed Saracen and is completed by an inscription that reads *Referre paratus* ("ready to respond"). The script of the play, whose purpose is to facilitate the spectator's comprehension, explains the meaning of this composition: "he wishes to demonstrate his readiness to clash only with those who mean to strike him," thereby emphasizing his role of mediator and teacher in combat. The procession then continues with the appearance of three pairs of knights, the first of which bears a device illustrating his bravery in battle: the image is that of a tree that has been cut down near the root and the motto *Tanto impetus validior* ("and even more effective on the attack"), expressing the promise that "he will demonstrate as much bravery in shattering his lance at the haft as does the power of the wind in shattering a tree as near the root as possible." The second knight of this first pair bears a motto depicting a rocket-like projectile apparently carrying its ruinous and threatening flame toward the heavens: yet in fact, it is a symbol of joy and celebration; this is why the drawing is accompanied by the inscription *Minatur innocenter* ("it threatens innocently"). Although appearing to threaten war, it heralds nothing other than a celebration.



The first knight of the second pair now appears, carrying the heraldic device of his own family. This boarder at the college, Girolamo Monti, playing the role of the knight, presents his personal mark of identity: a device bearing a painted image of a lily, accompanied by the motto *Cedite Flores* ("Submit, flowers!"). By this means the excellence of the combatants is equated with that of the lily in the world of flowers: the lily being the best. The second knight of this pair does not use the inspiration of nature but bears on his device the painted image of a flaming clay ball and the motto *Fracta micabit* ("it will shine when it is shattered"). This expresses the knight's hope that in shattering his lance he will be like those balls which, launched at the enemy, demonstrate their worth by shattering in a shower of light.

The reference to the use of arms is even more clear in the device of the first knight of the third pair. Here the image is that of a bolt of lightning, accompanied by the motto *Fracta de nube* ("broken by the cloud"). This indicates the similarity between the lance and the cloud: just as the cloud demonstrates its great force by breaking at the moment it sends a bolt of lightning, so does the knight demonstrate his courage when, after having broken his lance, he strikes down his enemy with a rapier. The device of the second knight of this last pair refers to the college. It bears the image of a bell-tower which, by its coat of arms and painted insignia, identifies it with the College of Rome. Additionally, the motto *Et ad arma* ("and arms too") signifies that, while being a man of letters, the knight is also expert in the use of the arms in the same way as the bell-tower, usually used for peaceful purposes and the calling of students to class, can also be rung as a call to arms.<sup>12</sup> The final knight to appear is the *Chevalier en incognito* who, because he is unidentified, must be invited to battle by the Master of the Field. His device bears the painted image of a sun covered by clouds, beyond which only a few rays of light escape; its motto, *Ferit ardentius* ("he wounds more passionately"), indicates that because he is veiled and unknown, he must accomplish great military feats.

The similarities inspired by nature, or by the use of arms, or by a mark of distinction, either personal (such as the lily of the boarding-student Monti) or collective (the bell-tower of the College of Rome), offered the opportunity to highlight the chivalric character

of these new soldiers of faith, thereby renewing the ancient tradition of the *milites Christi*. These devices both drew attention to the merits and qualities of these soldiers and made manifest a form of cultural activity typical of the chivalric milieu of the period: that of painting “subtle, humorous, and erudite witticisms” on the shields and armor of soldiers in order to be “an inspiration to military action.” As Emanuele Tesauro showed in his study of the origins of these erudite compositions among the knights of 16th century Italy, motivation is expressed “in such a way that, by trading insults via the symbols borne by the devices, they will do battle no less with the mind than the hand; and that sometimes they will even inflict deeper wounds with the subtleties of these sallies than with the sword.”<sup>13</sup>

These arms of erudition, peaceful but in no sense innocuous, were featured in Jesuit theater because they served both to reflect and model the chivalric spirit of the students. Moreover, because the creation and interpretation of emblems depended on erudition, Jesuit education paid special attention to them. To liven up the readings and to facilitate the understanding of texts, the Jesuit schools made use of a variety of figurative devices which, as J.B. Herman pointed out, were based on the method of “intuitive instruction.”<sup>14</sup> For example, in order to make an historical narrative more clear, a map might be drawn up depicting the cities and rivers the hero crossed in the course of his adventures. Engravings of ancient monuments were used to teach Roman history or to contextualize scenes from ancient life; epigraphs and inscriptions were used to facilitate the study of certain ritual practices of the Romans, and through numismatics, students could be exposed to the facial features of important historical personages, or to symbolic images of the gods and to certain episodes from mythology.

By getting into the habit of handling imagery associated with these auxiliary fields of knowledge, students were given the opportunity to familiarize themselves with branches of learning that made use of particularly subtle and refined operations; these included the arts of emblems, enigmas, and epigraphs. Although barely distinguishing them from the study of Antiquity, the *Ratio Studiorum* nevertheless recommends that professors of rhetoric sometimes use “the day off ... with erudition in mind ... to



explain less well-known things, such as hieroglyphs, emblems, and questions concerning poetic technique (epigrams, epitaphs, odes, elegies, epics, tragedies); or else the Senates of Rome and Athens, the military institutions of these two peoples, their gardens, clothes, tricliniums, their arches of triumph, Sibyls and other analogous phenomena, provided they are chosen with care."<sup>15</sup>

Such allegorical drawings, accompanied by a brief maxim and generally known by the term "emblem," were thus in general use at Jesuit schools, especially as they were considered to be well-suited for teaching moral truths – this because they were composed of aphorisms and precepts – by intuitive means. Furthermore, Father Menestrier points out the potential importance of emblems for "study and for morals," since the art of emblems is nothing less than "the art of depicting morals and the demonstration in images of the operations of Nature for the instruction of men."<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, although the inclusion, within a Jesuit play, of a procession in which emblems are exhibited, is tied to academic concerns and the necessity of demonstrating to the public the wealth of instruction given to its students, this does not mean that its has no function from the point of view of pure representation. Although the gate scene is fully integrated into the plot of the play, it also serves a role of linguistic and dramatic amplification. In fact, the celebration of the Pope's election and the exhibition of military games function as dramaturgical justification for establishing a connection by the simultaneous intertwining of the constituent elements of the dramatic language (word and image). This increases both their effectiveness and visibility.

However, due to the dominance of image over word, a shift occurs in the communicative act, modifying the way in which the spectator receives the message: by showing the spectator a procession of knights in which the dramatic event is centered around engraved plaques, it is the figurative composition that is first seen. The result is similar to the way in which the traditions of Antiquity described the encounter with an illustration.

Cicero called *illustratio* that which "does not so much say as show," and he then goes to define the result of such an operation: "the feelings that will result will be the same as if we had been present at the event."<sup>17</sup> When there is a shift in emphasis from

“telling” to “showing,” the idea of a coexistence among elements of a different nature becomes central to the language of drama; these separate elements exist in parallel to the principal narrative structure and are revealed in the course of the play. These “illustrative” elements can consist of scholarly references, or in easily recognizable visual landmarks that serve to create an evocative landscape and a sense of suspended time within the narrative: as, for example, in dramatic effects, or in the symbolic images embedded in the allegories. Thus a different kind of logic is integrated into the presentation, one that is less rational than the narrative logic of the play: this occurs via certain visual elements that strike the spectator’s imagination, creating an affective shock that replaces the interest created by the words spoken in the course of the narrative chain of events.

As for this question of *affectus*, it must be kept in mind that in the 17th century, under the impetus of the Jesuits who paid special attention to the registers of the various senses, there was a marked increase in the production of “spiritual pictures” and sacred *ekphrases*,<sup>18</sup> both of which are meditative exercises inspired by Ignatius’s own spiritual method, itself based on the encounter with sacred images. In his *ekphrasis* on the “*Peinture Spirituelle*” found at the House of Probation of Saint André and Saint Vitale in Rome, Father Louis Richeome describes the pictures he encounters as he walks around the church: after having spoken of “oral pictures” he reaches the refectory and there develops an argument to account for the differences between aural and colored pictures, between word and image: “Colored pictures are permanent; those of the ear disappear rapidly. This is because once the reader, or Preacher, has finished speaking, all that lingers in the mind of the listener is the imagination of the voice and the discourse that remains within the soul ...” He then contrasts this with the way in which paintings are perceived: “The painted picture is perceived all at once, while the aural picture is perceived in parts: this is because the Biblical reading or sermon enters the ear word by word, paragraph by paragraph, in pieces, just as meat does in the stomach; for this reason paintings are conducive to contemplation, where one can see all of what one contemplates; hearing is more conducive to meditation, which is discourse by antecedents; as a

result, it is roundabout discourse, with many twists and turns, ebbs and flows ..."<sup>19</sup> Based on this introduction to the Jesuit sensibility of the seventeenth century, we can more easily grasp the importance accorded to the insertion of these devices within the continuous flux of dramatic narration; while the words spoken by the actors function temporally, the device's image and inscription inhabit the visual space.

## Rhetorical and Theatrical Presentations of the Emblem

During the 16th century, theoretical discussions of the rules of emblematic composition centered around defining the constituent elements of the emblem. Alciati's tripartite model, which became the standard,<sup>20</sup> conceived of the emblem as being composed of a "body," the image, and a "soul," broken into two parts, title and subscript. The promulgation of Paolo Giovio's five rules of emblematic composition created a framework that became the cornerstone of an approach that, favored by scholars and encouraged in the academies, dominated the analytical landscape.<sup>21</sup> A group of widely-disseminated commentaries, focused on a small number of "celebrated devices," was advanced to support an approach that enjoyed widespread popularity: whether distinguished from or identified with other allegorical forms, the device and emblem became an element of rhetoric, analyzable in Aristotelian terms. This new generation of works, marked by the importance accorded to theoretical speculation and a growing intellectual sophistication, established fixed benchmarks that helped to move the discussion of rhetoric forward and ultimately enabled to make it an explicit component of ethics.

In 1598, Scipione Ammirato, in *Il Rota*, defined the emblem as "a knot of words and things," thereby giving a richer turn to observations concerning the connection between textual and pictorial elements of the emblem.<sup>22</sup> The image of the knot suggests a unity of meaning that makes the two forms of expression complementary and centers the discussion on how the relationship is realized and the rules governing its composition. In this sense, the language of the emblem remains concealed behind the rhetorical

processes that produce it, since the emblem is nothing but an embodiment of its creator's act of mind. As Torquato Tasso explained to a certain Count of Averse in his *Dialogo dell'Imprese*, an emblem is an "expression of the concept of the soul, made with analogous and appropriate images."<sup>23</sup> As a reification of the concept, the emblem must establish correspondences between the idea and the two elements (textual and visual) employed in its composition. This is done by making use of either both semantic codes separately or the point of rhetorical intersection that the association of the two elements allows. The establishment of such bold linkages and relations is based on the ingenuity of the construction, consisting in the synthetic connection created between the things. The best expression of the *ingenium* lying at the heart of this process is the free play of the mind or, as Tesauro called it, "the marvelous power of the intellect." According to him, it consists of two natural talents: perspicacity and eclecticism. "Perspicacity penetrates the most remote and minuscule qualities of an object, whether it be substance, matter, form, accident, property, cause, effect, ends, sympathies, antipathies, the similar, the same, the superior, the inferior, labels, proper names, equivocations: which are found in all objects, hidden or balled up. Eclecticism, on the other hand, rapidly compares all these elements among themselves, or a single element with the subject; it links and divides them; adds and subtracts them; produces one from the other; sketches the one by using the other; and with marvelous skill puts one in the other's place, as jugglers do with balls. And he can be even more ingenious when he has knowledge of, and can link, the most disparate circumstances ..."<sup>24</sup>

Tesauro argues that the device, when conceived as a branch of artful argumentation (French *argutie*), itself a product of *argumentum*, finds its most perfect realization in the metaphor, that is to say in something "that signifies one thing by another, and not in terms of itself." As such, it demonstrates that "in being a product of the mind no less than of the word, the metaphor, across all genres, expresses one concept by the intermediary of an other, quite different one: thus revealing the similar in the dissimilar."<sup>25</sup> As for the device of Louis the Twelfth, Tesauro states: "If King Louis were simply to say, 'I will kill all my enemies, both near and far,'

then he would have expressed himself properly and in the ordinary manner. However, to signify this concept, he chose an insignia bearing the image of a porcupine, an animal that can prick near or fire quills from afar; this is a metaphor and this is a device."<sup>26</sup> These semantic shifts are actualized either through the use of the syllogism, which is an instrument of demonstration, or by induction, that is to say by example or paradigm; or by both together. However, Tesauro's conception of the metaphorical essence of the device, by providing metaphorical discourse with a reasoning function, produces a virtual overthrow of the classical rhetorical tradition, according to which the metaphor falls into the category of *ornatus*, a figure added as an ornament to or means of accentuating an already formed thought. Tesauro's metaphor, while seen as a constituent element of the construction of an argument and therefore firmly fixed in *elocutio*, nevertheless seems to become a figure of thought rather than remaining a figure of speech. This idea of metaphor as the foundation of thought is made even more explicit by a contemporary of Tesauro, the German Jesuit Jacob Masen, who published his work *Speculum imaginum veritatis occultae* in 1650.<sup>27</sup> Basing his approach on the Renaissance emblematic tradition, and directly inspired by the Cesar Ripa's *Iconologia*, which was published in 1593, Masen calls his theory of emblematic compositions *ars iconomystica* or *ars symbolographica*. This art is based on the central role played by the *res picta* in relation to the *verba*, that is to say of the painted thing in relation to spoken things. In fact, his analysis of emblematic compositions reveals the preeminence of the image, assigning a subordinate role to the word.

In this work, which is simultaneously etymological and historical, Masen suggests a relation among the terms *fictio*, *formare*, and *figurare*: by asserting such an etymological connection – one that had been suggested by Cicero as well – Masen is able to use the term *forma* as a synonym for *figurare*.<sup>28</sup> This step allows him to use procedures reserved for metaphor construction to construct images: "*Imago, uti sermo est, alia propria, alia translata, seu figurata*" ("The image is like the word, used in its literal, metaphorical, or figurative sense").<sup>29</sup> He then distinguishes between the work of the "painter" and the "iconographer": the painter's task is to

depict reality and he must therefore strive to depict things as near to their inherent signification as possible; the task of the iconographer, like the poet's, is on the contrary to paint an *imago figurata* which, by endowing the image with a metaphorical meaning, goes beyond reality.

In order to construct these *imagines figuratae* and to establish the relationship between the represented and signified thing, Masen makes use of the new kind of thinking (French *argutie*) or, as he calls it, *Ars nova argutiarum*, referring to syllogistic-rhetorical reasoning as *genus summum*, which has its place in the first category of rhetoric, the *inventio*. It is thus not a question of stylistic figures and their relationship to elocution; rather Masen speaks of areas of similarity and contrariety (*similia atque contraria*). The discussion of tropes thus becomes the foundation of thought itself, the mind relying on them to construct its syllogisms. In effect, the role of the new way of reasoning (*argutie*) is to strike the spectator's imagination with words and thoughts, often through opposition and paradox, thereby appealing to the new aesthetic postulates of novelty and the unexpected. For Masen, as for Aristotle and Quintillien, the most important logical relation is the one governing the similarity (the most distant possible) between *significans* (the sign) and *significatum* (the thing signified); for it is this that determines the signification, not only of the verbal metaphor, but of the image as well.<sup>30</sup>

However, the edifice constructed on these kinds of rhetorical operations (that is, the emblem) does not reveal its result immediately: its deciphering is left to the mental acuity of those who have been initiated into these kinds of constructions. The charm of this activity lies in the effort required to discover the compositional play embodied in the emblem; and the pleasure of its decoding lies in the process of "recognizing" and traversing, although in the opposite direction, the same path as the author of the emblem, via one's own "mental theater." It is this mechanism, Tesauro writes, which is the basis of the "double pleasure" between "the one who constructs" and "the one who understands": "because the former is happy to give life to his noble creation within the mind of the latter; while the latter takes pleasure in seizing, by the power of his own mind, what the former's shrewdly hides."<sup>31</sup> This mutual



relation progresses as a form of “playful reticence,” based on the revelation of what is hidden and unspoken, what is outlined rather than given. Pleasure is thus able to follow the play of give and take that is enacted within a network of correspondences. In so doing, the mind is led to discover the emblem’s real meaning, different than the one that appears at first glance.

The decoding of emblems was a regular activity in the schools run by the Society of Jesus. Indeed emblematic compositions, which the study of rhetoric and the humanities made an object of interpretation and creation, were displayed on school walls every two months and in honor of important feasts and holy days.<sup>32</sup> These ephemeral decorations, which periodically changed the look of the school’s rooms, were in part intended to develop the students’ abilities to go beyond the pure appearance of the image and the literal meaning of the word; instead, the students were to begin to see them as vehicles of a decoding process, in the end becoming not only “excellent inventors” but also “knowledgeable spectators” of emblems. As playful interlocutors of these mental games, the students learned to take pleasure in interpreting them. “It is very pleasant,” wrote the Jesuit Daniello Bartoli in his collection *De simboli trasportati alla morale* (Symbols Transposed to Morals), “to see, as Aristotle says, ‘one thing inside another’; and in comparing the true with the seeming, to achieve knowledge: the one being the other, although it is not truly so except as imitation; in being a representation it brings not only pleasure but expresses through art what the imitated thing expresses through nature.”<sup>33</sup> Masen, in codifying the rules of composition, as well as the reception, of *Imagines figuratae* in Book IV of his *Speculum*, demonstrates his deep understanding of how the interpretation of an emblem is dependent on the way in which the spectator’s attention is directed. In his description of the play of give and take between the image and the epigram (to the benefit of the image), Masen provides the key to understanding the spectator’s reception of the emblem, using for his demonstration the comparison of two rhetorical operations, *protasis* and *apodisis*: “*Expositio verò, sive illa versibus, sive oratione soluta absolvatur, rem per figuram significatam explicat, ac comparationem protasis cum apodisi instituit.*” (“In truth, the meaning of the epigram, whether expressed in verse or

prose, explains the thing by the figure shown and establishes a comparison between *protasis* and *apodosis*.”)<sup>34</sup>

This comparison recalls certain mechanisms of dramatic composition that have already been reviewed: according to classical rhetoric, the role of *protasis* in a dramatic composition is one of arrangement, that is, of division between an initial, preparatory phase, in which the intrigue, or dramatic kernel, is unveiled by the release of information that creates the situation (*protasis*); and of a second phase in which the situation is intensified (*epistasis*). The *protasis* therefore corresponds to that part of a dramatic composition in which the subject of the play is disclosed: while providing information and the material elements of the situation, its dramatic function is to heighten tension and expectation in the spectator. By contrast, the *apodosis* is the element that lessens and ultimately resolves the tension. The process of the *expositio*, or the decoding of the *imago figurata*, is resolved – according to Masen – when the *protasis*, announced in the *res picta*, and the *apodosis*, which is constituted by the *res significata*, are consummated in the *collatio*, the act in which the spectator compares the two.

Masen’s presentation, although revealing the homology between the rhetorical strategies at work in theatrical and emblematic compositions, nevertheless allows a kind of theatrical autonomy for the emblem. While the task of Jesuit school drama was to incorporate and exhibit all the practices and exercises associated with representation, emblematic compositions were not merely fortuitous elements in these spectacles: as could be seen in *Ignatio in Monserrato*, they constituted instead so many independent dramatic syntheses. It can thus be asserted that there existed, in the 17th century, a theater of emblems, since each emblem proved to be a “portrait” of the theater itself: not a mere drawing that represented the theater, but a picture offering the very same kind of play of mirrors as the one being presented on stage.

## Notes

1. C.-F. Menestrier, *L'art des emblèmes*, Paris, 1674, p. 2.
2. On the complex history of the origins of these compositions see C. Balavoine, J. Laponde, and P. Laurens, *Le modèle de la Renaissance*, Paris, 1986.
3. For a full and quite comprehensive bibliography see M. Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery*, London, 1947 (2nd revised and enlarged ed.), Vol. II. See also A. Schöne's and A. Henkel's monumental *Emblemata. Handbuch zur Sinnbildkunst des XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart, 1967.
4. C.-F. Menestrier (note 1 above), p.4.
5. On the Jesuits' production of emblems, see G. R. Dimler, "A Bibliographical Survey of Jesuit Emblem Authors in German-Speaking territories," in: *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu (AHSI)*, 45 (1976), pp. 129-38; idem, "Jesuit Emblem Books in the Belgian Provinces of the Society, 1578-1710," in: *AHSI*, 46 (1977), pp. 377-86; idem, "A bibliographical Survey of Jesuit Emblem Authors in French Provinces, 1618-1726," in: *AHSI*, 47 (1978), pp. 233-50; idem, "A Bibliographical Survey of Emblem Books by Jesuit Colleges in the Early Society," in: *AHSI*, 48 (1979), pp. 289-310.
6. J.-M. Chatelain, *Livres d'emblèmes et de devises. Une anthologie (1531-1735)*, Paris, 1993.
7. E. Tesaurus, *Il Cannocchiale aristotelico o sia, Idea dell'arguta et ingegniosa elocutione, che serve a tutta l'arte oratoria, lapidaria et simbolica, esaminata co' principii del divino Aristotele ... accresciuto di due nuovi trattati, cioè des concetti predicabili et degli emblemata*, Venice, 1682 (1st ed.: Turin, 1654).
8. *Ibid.*, p. 400. For a critical analysis of this work see E. Raimondi, *Letteratura Barocca*, Florence, 1982; M. Zanardi, "La metafore e la sua dinamica di significazione nel 'Cannocchiale Aristotelico' di Emanuele Tesaurus," in: *Giornale Storico della letteratura italiana*, Vol. CLVII (1980), pp. 321-68.
9. On the celebrations at the Collegio Romano on the occasion of the canonization of Ignatius of Loyola and François Xavier, see B. Filippi, "'Grandes et petites actions' au Collège Romain. Formation rhétorique et théâtre jésuite au XVIIe siècle," in: *Les représentations symboliques du pouvoir à Rome*, in press.
10. SOGGETTO/ D'IGNATIO/ IN MONSERRATO,/ ovvero Mutatione d'Armi./ ATTIONE TRAGICOMICA,/ Che da giovani del Seminario Romano si rappresenta in Collegio Romano della Compagnia di GIESU./ Disteso in Atti, e Scene dal Signor Don Girolamo Cao/ Sardo Convittore del medesimo Seminario./ IN ROMA,/ Appresso Alessandro Zannetti. MDCXXIII./ Con licenza de' Superiori, p. 7.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
13. E. Tesaurus (note 7 above), p. 378.
14. J.-B. Herman, *La pédagogie des jésuites au XVIe siècle. Ses sources, ses caractéristiques*, Paris, 1914, p. 286.
15. *Ratio Studiorum*, Reg. Prof. Rhet., No. 15, in: L. Lukacs (ed.), *Monumenta Paedagogica (MP)*, Rome, Vol. V, pp. 427f.
16. C.-F. Menestrier (note 1 above), p.3.
17. Quintilian, *Inst. Orat.*, VI, II, 32.

18. On the humanist exercise of *ekphrasis*, see M. Baxandall, *Les Humanistes à la découverte de la composition en peinture, 1340-1450*, Paris, 1989, pp. 110-24 (1st ed.: London, 1971); on the introduction of this exercise into the sacred literature of the seventeenth century, see M. Fumaroli, *L'Age de l'éloquence. Rhétorique et res literaria de la Renaissance au seuil de l'époque classique*, Geneva, 1980, pp. 257-73.
19. L. Richeome, "La Peinture Spirituelle ou l'art d'admirer, aimer et louer Dieu en toutes ses oeuvres, et tirer de toutes profit salutaire, au Tres Reverend Pere Claude Acquaviva General de la Compagnie de Iesus ...," in: *Les Oeuvres*, Paris, 1928, Vol. II, p. 392.
20. A. Alciati, *Emblematum libellus*, Paris, 1535 (1st ed.: Basle, 1531).
21. The five rules are: 1) the composite must be rightly proportioned between the body (la figure) and the soul (le motto); 2) it must not be so obscure as to require an oracle for interpretation; nor must it be so clear as to be understood by the crowd; 3) above all, it had to be pleasing, that is to say, it must depict things that were agreeable to the eye such as stars, fire, water, trees, tools, animals, legendary birds; 4) it must not depict human forms; 5) the "motto" had to be conceived in an idiom that was different from that which constituted the composite, because in the emblem feeling had to be veiled; the "motto" was to be shorter, but not so brief as to be obscure or ambiguous. See P. Giovio, *Dialogo dell'Imprese militari e amaroze*, Rome, 1555.
22. A. Scipione, *Il Rota over delle Imprese del Signor Ammirato Scipione nel qual si ragiona di molte Imprese di diversi eccellenti autori, e di alcune regole, e avvertimenti intorno questa materia*, Florence, 1598.
23. See T. Tasso, *Dialogo dell'Imprese*, Naples (1594), p. 17.
24. E. Tesauro (note 7 above), p. 51.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 384.
27. J. Masen, *Speculum imaginum veritatis occultae, exhibens symbola, emblemata, hieroglyphica, aenigmata, omni tam materiae, quam formae varietate, exemplis simul, ac praeceptis illustratum*, Cologne, 1650.
28. On Masen's etymological research, see B. Bauer, *Jesuitische "ars rhetorica" im Zeitalter der Glaubenskämpfe*, Frankfurt/Main, 1986, pp. 508f.
29. J. Masen (note 27 above), p. 1.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
31. E. Tesauro (note 7 above), p. 11. On the ludic aspect, see also M. Zanardi, "Metafora e gioco nel 'Cannocchiale Aristotelico' di Emanuele Tesauro," in: *Studi Secenteschi*, Vol. XXVI, pp. 25-99.
32. *Ratio Studiorum*, Reg. Praef. Stud., No. 3, *MP*, Vol. V, p. 403; Reg. Prof. Rhet., No. 18, *MP*, Vol. V, p. 428; Reg. Prof. Human., No. 10, *MP*, Vol. V, p. 433; Reg. Acad. Rhet. et Human., No. 7, *MP*, Vol. V, p. 453.
33. D. Bartoli, *De' simboli trasportati alla morale*, Rome, 1677, p. 5.
34. J. Masen (note 27 above), p. 561.