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INTRODUCTION

Emblems and devices played a central rôle in the cultural life of seventeenth-century France. Demand was enough to allow over one hundred editions of the Père Claude-François Menestrier's various emblematically concerned writings. Emblems and devices were used as an essential component of royal entries, ballets and funerals. They were often the subject of discussion among the *salonistes* or could be used for the purposes of religious propaganda. Only recently, thanks to scholars such as Mario Praz, Peter Daly and Daniel Russell have we been able to appreciate the importance of this phenomenon within the culture of the reign of Louis XIV.¹

The aim of this study is to apply such relatively new perspectives to improve our understanding of French literature of the period in context. The work is not, therefore, an analysis of emblematics per se, but rather an attempt at a reconsideration of our attitude towards major writings of the seventeenth century in the light of information that until recently had been unavailable or grossly neglected.

There are of course some models in the field. Recent critical approaches to seventeenth-century French literature have thrown new light on important parallel issues such as that of text/image interaction or the influence of emblem-related forms. Raymond LePage has considered methods of reading the illustrations of La Fontaine's *Fables*² and Boris Donn , Jean-Pierre Collinet and Fran oise Charpentier have discussed the influence of Francesco Colonna's *Songe de Poliphile* upon La Fontaine's *Psych *,³ to cite but four examples. More generally, Fran oise Siguret's *L'Œil surpris*⁴ considers questions of visual perception and the interpretation of images in the early seventeenth century. She takes specific examples from Descartes's *Dioptrique*, Corneille's *Illusion comique* and Etienne Binet's *Merveilles de la nature*.

With direct reference to the emblem and device Kurt Weinberg, Margaret McGowan, Patrick Dandrey and Leonard Johnson have produced excellent articles that apply a knowledge of emblematics to works of Mme. de La Fayette, Jean de La Fontaine and Tristan L'Hermitte.⁵ Daly has worked on English and German literature and Russell upon French poetry of the sixteenth century.⁶ However, whereas the latter examples do not concern French seventeenth-century literature, the former have the limited scope of the short article. Georges Couton too can be classed in this category; his work on La Fontaine and emblems forms part of his research on seventeenth-century allegory, but in reference to his *Écritures cod es*⁷ he openly admits that "On aimerait que ce petit livre, qui n'a aucune pr tention   l'exhaustivit , aid t, au moins

dans ses débuts, celui qui entreprendrait une recherche d'ensemble" (8). Such, in part, is precisely the aim of this work.

We shall approach this task through the vehicle of four precise, representative, but by no means unique, case studies of specific authors; these are intended to be of interest per se, but also as an indication of the possibilities for applying a specific method to other authors and works.

Our chosen authors are René Descartes, Tristan L'Hermite, Jean de La Fontaine and Charles Perrault. While all are major writers and thereby fit one of the requirements I set, they are perhaps as different each from the other as possible. Descartes, a *moderne* active in the first half of the century, was a philosopher generally writing in prose. He would have been influenced by the religious emblematics of the Jesuits of La Flèche. Tristan L'Hermite's poetry is also from the beginning of the century, but the particular influence we shall discuss, the love emblems of Otto Van Veen, is decidedly secular. La Fontaine, similarly a poet of importance but late in the reign of Louis XIV, was greatly influenced by the *anciens*. His salon circles were closely associated with much of the court emblematics of the time. Charles Perrault was a fellow member of the Académie Française in the latter part of the century, but a leading *moderne*. With him we return to prose compositions and consider the theory of emblematics.⁸

Emblematics can improve our understanding of literature on several levels. Only specific examples can demonstrate this amply, allowing conclusions to be drawn while going beyond mere generalities. On a primary, most precise level, Charles Perrault's *Discours sur l'art des devises* represents the author's own theory of emblematics, a subject he considered important enough to mention in his *Mémoires de ma vie*.⁹

In other cases a knowledge of emblematics can help us seize specific aspects of a text hitherto not in evidence. Following Leonard Johnson's example, we will show how certain of Tristan's poems operate as direct references to the emblems of Van Veen. In the case of La Fontaine, H. Gaston Hall has analysed the notion of *contaminatio* using the example of "La Grenouille qui veut se faire aussi grosse que le boeuf" (*Fable* I, III) and borrowings from Jean Baudoin and Terence.¹⁰ In chapter V of the present study we will show that the final line of La Fontaine's *Fable* II, XVI ("Le Corbeau voulant imiter l'aigle"), "Où la Guêpe a passé le Moucheron demeure," refers directly to Guillaume Guéroult's emblem 9, "De l'Araigné, de la guespe, & de la mouche." In such cases it is only when we are able to pick up the emblematic reference that we can fully appreciate the significance of the text in question.

On a broader level, understanding the structure of the emblem and the mentality that allowed it such a success can help us to understand the structure of literary texts composed under such influence. Tristan's poetry, for example, in the specific context of manuscripts now in Glasgow University Library, can be seen to operate as a single element in an amalgamized composition that functions through the bringing together of texts and images from multiple sources. Similarly, visual elements can be read as part of a text (e.g. the decorative arts of Vaux-le-Vicomte with respect to La Fontaine's *Songe de Vaux*¹¹) or textual images evoking pictures (e.g. Descartes's reference to the climbing ivy in the *Discours de la méthode*) could be seen as forming an

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emblematic *imago*, requiring the reader of the time to approach the text via a global image rather than through the 'linear' reading that would probably be automatic to us today. Understanding the cultural phenomenon of emblematics can, in this way, bring us closer to the literary mentality of the age and thereby help us avoid anachronistic readings as we approach the texts themselves today.

Emblematic influence in its most general form involves the cultural context of the authors in question as well as the very nature of their works; Joan DeJean,¹² David Lee Rubin,¹³ Jürgen Grimm,¹⁴ Jean-Pierre Collinet,¹⁵ John D. Lyons¹⁶ and Amédée Carriat¹⁷ are among those who have offered much insight in this field; nonetheless it is a notion that has often been overlooked by critics. Much of this context can be reconstructed from materials like those to be found in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal's *Recueil Conrart*. This collection, consisting essentially of manuscript pieces from the literary circles of the seventeenth century, shows, among other things, that much of the pro-Fouquet propaganda came in the form of *Recueils de devises*; in chapter V of this study we shall demonstrate how the same series of manuscripts shows the closeness of the fable and emblem forms in La Fontaine's time. Descartes's education at La Flèche included the study of Jesuit emblems whose clarity and concision to pedagogical purposes would later be the hallmarks of the Cartesian method. These kinds of knowledge of a major prevalent cultural influence are essential if we are to understand the basic workings of the seventeenth-century literary mind.

To repeat, our study will aim to demonstrate this hypothesis through the examples of four specific authors. In the case of Descartes and La Fontaine our studies will work from the specific to the general while relating to the authors' published works. Our chapters on Tristan and Perrault will concentrate on the presentation and analysis of little-known manuscript texts that are directly concerned with emblematics. Our conclusions are obviously intended to be of particular interest to scholars of these authors; however the implications of the study's method go far beyond such specific cases. We should constantly bear in mind that the same sort of approach can also be applied to such other authors of the period as Jean Racine, Blaise Pascal or Mme. de Scudéry. Applied to other writers in similar fashion, the study's method should help put a new, more accurate perspective on our reading of seventeenth-century French literature in general.

NOTES

¹ Mario Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Rome: Edizione di Storia et Letteratura, 1975). Peter M. Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem: Structural Parallels Between the Emblem and Literature in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1979). Daniel Russell, *The Emblem and Device in France* (Lexington: French Forum, 1985). A new edition is forthcoming.

² Raymond G. LePage, "The 1668 Edition of the *Fables*: An Iconographic Interpretation," *L'Esprit Créateur* 21.4 (1981), 66-77.

³ Boris Donné, *La Fontaine et la poétique du songe: Récit, rêverie et allégorie dans Les Amours de Psyché* (Paris: Champion, 1995), especially pages 162-80. Jean-Pierre Collinet, *Le Monde*

littéraire de La Fontaine (Paris: PUF, 1970; Geneva: Slatkine, 1989), especially pages 95-106 and 435-38. Francoise Charpentier, "De Colonna à La Fontaine: Le Nom de Poliphile," *L'Intelligence du passé: Les Faits, l'écriture et les sens: Mélanges offerts à Jean Lafond*, eds. Pierre Aquilon, Jacques Chupeau and others (Tours: Université François Rabelais, 1988), 369-78

⁴ *L'Œil surpris: Perception et représentation dans la première moitié du XVIIe siècle* (1985; Paris: Klincksieck, 1993).

⁵ Kurt Weinberg, "The Lady and the Unicorn, or M. de Nemours à Couloumiers: Enigma, Device, Blazon and Emblem in La Princesse de Clèves," *Euphorion* 71 (1977), 306-55. Margaret M. McGowan, "Moral Intention in the Fables of La Fontaine," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 29 (1966), 264-81. Patrick Dandrey, "De l'Art des devises à la poétique de l'apologue: La Préface des *Fables* de La Fontaine (1668) à la lumière du traité des *Devises* de P. Le Moyne (1666)," *Le Fablier* 7 (1995), 105-23. Leonard Johnson, "Amorun emblemata: Tristan L'Hermite and the Emblematic Tradition," *Renaissance Quarterly* 21 (1968), 429-41.

⁶ Daniel Russell, "Emblematic Structures in Sixteenth-Century French Poetry," *Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik* 14 (1982), 54-100, and *Emblematic Structures in Renaissance French Culture* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1995).

⁷ *Écritures codées: Essais sur l'allégorie au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Aux Amateurs de Livres, 1990).

⁸ For an overview of recent critical approaches to the study of our four primary authors, see the introductory sections to chapters III to VI respectively.

⁹ See chapter VI for full references and further explanation.

¹⁰ H. Gaston Hall, "Contaminatio in a Fable by La Fontaine (1,3)," *PFSCL* 11 (1979), 91-106.

¹¹ On the rôles and interaction of the four Allegories in the *Songe de Vaux*, see specifically Robert N. Nicolich's "The Triumph of Language: The Sister Arts and Creative Activity in La Fontaine's *Songe de Vaux*," *L'Esprit Créateur* 21.4 (1981), 10-21.

¹² "La Fontaine's *Psyché*: The Reflecting Pool of Classicism," *L'Esprit Créateur* 21.4 (1981), 99-109. This and the remainder of the works cited in this introduction will be discussed further in the chapters that follow.

¹³ *A Pact with Silence: Art and Thought in the Fables of Jean de La Fontaine* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1991).

¹⁴ "Stratégies de désorientation dans les 'Fables' de La Fontaine," *Ouverture et dialogue: Mélanges offerts à Wolfgang Leiner à l'occasion de son soixantième anniversaire*, eds. Ulrich Döring, Antiopy Lyroudias and Rainer Zaiser (Tübingen: Narr, 1988), 175-91.

¹⁵ *Le Monde littéraire de La Fontaine*.

¹⁶ "Camera Obscura: Image and Imagination in Descartes's *Méditations*," *Convergences: Rhetoric and Poetic in Seventeenth-Century France*, eds. David L. Rubin and Mary B. McKinley (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1989), 179-95.

¹⁷ *Tristan ou l'éloge d'un poète* (Limoges: Rougerie, 1955).