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Playing and displaying love.

Theatricality in Otto van Veen's *Amoris divini emblemata* (Antwerp 1615)¹

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Introduction



Fig. 1 Gravata respuit

In the emblem *Gravata respuit* in Otto van Veen's *Amoris divini emblemata*, Divine Love directs the soul towards heaven.² He points her away from the attachment to the world, which her left hand shows she too is rejecting. As she looks into his eyes, she places her right hand on her heart, in order to assure him that she understands his commands, perhaps even to request his approval.

One of the major innovations in Vaenius' *Amoris divini emblemata* is the presence of Divine Love and the soul in all emblem pictures but one. Divine Love and the soul are not just any two *Hinweiser*. The soul is portrayed as in need to be saved and in need of the help of Amor Divinus. In many respects, the soul and Divine Love exist because they are being looked at; they are actors staging condensed representations of highly symbolic scenes from the drama of human salvation. In a sense, when Van Veen added the soul and Divine Love to the pictures he set himself a task not unlike a playwright's or even director's job: he had to make actors act so as to convince an audience. Their presence turns the emblem pictures into something very much like theatre stills.

These dramatic features of *Amoris divini emblemata* were recently noticed by Agnès Guiderdoni: '[Anima and Amor Divinus] allowed for the dramatisation of the spiritual life and the love relationship between the soul and God. (...). Each emblem, as a dramatic nucleus, unveiled a new step of the narrative to the eyes of the meditating reader'.³ But already in the

¹ In a companion article to this one I report on using the EDITOR annotation toolset to investigate the issues I discuss here. Both of these articles elaborate on my talk at the Emblem Society's 2005 conference in Urbana-Champaign. Inevitably, there is considerable overlap between them. See Peter Boot, "Digital annotation of emblem books using EDITOR," *Early Modern Literary Studies* (forthcoming). I thank Arie Gelderblom, Els Stronks and Frans Wiering for their suggestions.

² Otto Van Veen, *Amoris divini emblemata* (Antwerp: Martinus Nutius, Joannes Meursius, 1615). The book is available on the web at <<http://emblems.let.uu.nl/emblems/html/v1615front.html>>. I will refer to the emblems by motto and number.

³ Agnès Guiderdoni-Bruslé, "L'ame amante de son Dieu by Madame Guyon (1717): Pure Love Between Antwerp, Paris and Amsterdam, at the Crossroads of Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy," *Intersections*, eds. Arie-Jan Gelderblom, Jan L. De Jong and Marc Van Vaeck, vol. 3 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2004).

17th century playwrights such as Scherer and Lang recognised the theatric potential of the spiritual love emblem, and wrote plays that staged the vicissitudes of the soul and divine love (or grace) in silent scenes.⁴

In the past, relations between emblem and theatre have been studied mainly from the point of view of the emblem's influence on the theatre. Schöne's *Emblematik und Drama* studied dramatic texts, language, and structure, even stage construction, from the perspective of the emblem. Countless studies attest to the influence of the emblem on Elizabethan drama.⁵ And while Schöne is not unaware of theatrical influence in the emblem, he unambiguously states the theatre was the main beneficiary in the exchange: 'Vom Bild zum Spiel führt die Entwicklung. Sie trägt dem Spiele seinen Bildcharakter zu'.⁶ Where the attention is on the theatre in the emblem, the subject is usually the theatre as a motif: the theatre as a stock metaphor for the deceptiveness and changeability of the world.⁷ Yet another strand of writing that relates theatre and emblem is concerned primarily with the memory theatre and the role of the emblem in the art of memory.⁸

In the present paper, I will look at *Amoris divini emblemata* from a theatrical perspective. The parallelism between the theatre and this emblem book is based on the shared characteristic of participants being assigned parts to perform in front of an audience. I will trace some consequences of this basic parallelism for Van Veen's emblems rather than focus on contemporary dramatic practice and its possible influences on the book. As an introduction, I will discuss some general agreements between emblem books such as Van Veen's and the theatre, more specifically the theatre still. The body of the article will then be devoted to showing some concrete examples.

Frozen theatricality

As students of the emblem we tend to feel that, among the literary arts, the emblem is very special in being at the same time a visual and a textual art. Both media, however, are also present in the theatre. Just like the emblem, it requires the spectator simultaneously to attend to a text and to visual events, events that have a spatial dimension. As George Kernodle wrote: 'It is time to recognize that the theatre is one of the visual arts. It is an offspring of literature on one side of the family tree, it is no less a descendant of painting and sculpture on the other side'.⁹ Some of the parallels between the theatre and the emblem, once pointed out, may seem self-evident, but I believe it is still useful to mention them, as they may widen our perspective on the emblem.

⁴ Barbara Bauer, "Das Bild als Argument. Emblematische Kulissen in den Bühnenmeditationen Franciscus Langs," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 64 (1982).

⁵ Cf. György E. Szőnyi, "The 'Emblematic' as a Way of Thinking and Seeing in Renaissance Culture," *e-Colloquia* 1.1 (2003).

⁶ Albrecht Schöne, *Emblematik und Drama im Zeitalter des Barock* (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1993) 225.

⁷ As in Michael Schilling, *Imagines Mundi. Metaphorische Darstellungen der Welt in der Emblematik*, *Mikrokosmos*, vol. 4 (Frankfurt am Main [etc.]: Lang, 1979).

⁸ Cf. Lina Bolzoni, "Emblemi e arte della memoria: Alcune note su invenzione e ricezione," *Florilegio de Estudios de Emblematica. A Florilegium of Studies on Emblematics. Actas del VI Congreso Internacional de The Society for Emblem Studies. Proceedings of the 6th International Conference of the Society for Emblem Studies. A Coruña, 2002*, ed. Sagrario López Poza (Ferrol: Sociedad de Cultura Valle Inclán, 2004).

⁹ George R. Kernodle, *From Art to Theatre. Form and Convention in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944) 2.

Adding to the representation of an emblematic object the representation of the interested parties of the Soul and Divine Love turns the object into an event. It turns the object's setting into a stage where this event can take place. The larger narrative of the soul's salvation is what turns these events into scenes in an encompassing drama.

The essential parallels between the *Amoris divini emblemata* emblems and the theatre derive from the presence of an ensemble of participants that play roles in front of an audience to stage a larger story. In both emblems and theatre, the human or humanoid figures are the principal bearers of meaning. Both show meaningful interaction between the participants.

It may not be self-evident to consider the human figures to be the main vehicles for significance in Van Veen's emblem pictures. The pictures also contain emblematic objects such as the sunflower or the peacock. The preferred attitude towards the objects, however, is defined by the behaviour and gestures of the human participants.

The basis for the analogy is therefore the personification of the abstract concepts of the soul and of divine love. Being personifications, they can act, and hence also play-act. It is important to notice that the participants play roles. Both representations (emblem and theatre) have been set up: they are not the representation of a naturally occurring event, they do not picture something pre-existing, but rather have been constructed, thought out, designed in order to evoke a specific response from the readers or viewers. They only pretend to represent.

There is another point of agreement between the theatre and the *Amoris divini emblemata* emblems in the relation between the participants and the spectators. In the theatre, actors can address the audience or other characters on stage. However, when ostensibly addressing the characters on stage, they implicitly also address the audience. Similarly, the participants in the emblem pictures can address the viewer and can address each other, but when addressing each other they are still addressing the audience too. Because of this, as in the theatre, in the emblem one can play to the audience or act so as to ignore it.

In the wake of Schöne, Kirchner has argued for the existence of a much wider parallel between emblem and drama, which is supposed to hold for the whole emblem genre, not just for emblems that show interacting human beings.¹⁰ This parallel is based on the emblem's and the drama's shared characteristic of being able both to represent and explain: 'Beide Kunstformen sind auf Grund ihrer deutungshaltigen Geschlossenheit in der Lage, hinter dem Schein der dargestellten Objekte und Ereignisse deren wirkliche Beschaffenheit aufzudecken: (...) Solche Verweiskraft begründet letztlich das wechselseitige Durchdringen von Emblem und Trauerspiel des Barock'. In the present article I will not go into this possible wider parallelism.

In some respects, rather than with the theatre itself, the emblem pictures agree with the theatre painting or theatre still, in that both have to represent a single instant from a larger scene. A frozen, unchanging image has to represent a scene that involves movement, change of position and action. The condensation of meaning from the larger scene into a single instant may naturally lead to gestures that are larger than life. Because of this, the emblem setting may foster playing towards the audience rather than towards the other participants, reinforcing thus the emblem's already present tendency towards didacticism.

If we compare emblem pictures to theatre stills, we view the emblem pictures as the record of a performance. What we engage with then is primarily the theatre in the sense of 'what takes place between and among performers and spectators', rather than with the drama,

¹⁰ Gottfried Kirchner, *Fortuna in Dichtung und Emblematik des Barock. Tradition und Bedeutungswandel eines Motivs*, Metzler Studienausgabe (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1970) 65-73.

a 'mode of fiction designed for stage representation'.¹¹ The emblems' didacticism however also suggests viewing the emblem pictures as some sort of screenplay, as a set of instructions for the reader to perform. The approaches are complementary, and fit well with the notion of the soul as an idealized reader.

The emblem texts too can sometimes be considered from both angles. Emblem text viewed as a record of what is spoken in a production of a play, can be viewed alternatively as a dramatic text, a text to be performed by the characters in the picture (and/or by the reader). In the case of *Amoris divini emblemata* however, much of the epigrammatic text should be considered as explanatory text, spoken by a commentator. I will come back to the issue in the discussion of the emblem texts.

In the remainder of this paper I will study the emblems of *Amoris divini emblemata* from the point of view of this 'frozen' and possibly magnifying theatricality. The questions I will ask are the following:

- (1) How do the participants' actions (their gestures, the things they look at, the positions of their bodies) serve to bring home the emblem's message?
- (2) How, if at all, does the emblem address its reader or spectator? How is the reader drawn into the dramatic situation?
- (3) Where does this leave the emblematic object? We tend to expect an emblem to present an object, or activity, or even a concept, which is explained to teach us a lesson. How does the presence of the dramatic action influence the presentation of this emblematic object?

In a final section I will then briefly look at extending this line of investigation to the emblem texts.

Apart from the artistic agreements between the procedures of the emblem and those of the theatre, there are also agreements between these arts that follow from general social norms of decorum. Herman Roodenburg has pointed out how certain codes of civility permeated both social life and the arts (painting, theatre, even preaching).¹² In Vaenius' emblems, no one places his or her feet simply next to each other. The norms of *contrapposto* (one leg forward, a swelling of the hip, one shoulder lower than the other) are usually observed. For the gestures of rejection that we will discuss in the next section, the soul uses her left hand, turning her head away, as theorists about eloquence or the theatre agree that she should.¹³ Interesting as these parallels may be, at present they do not concern us.

Gestures

The central element in the pictorial language of the Baroque was, to quote Andreas Henning, 'die affektgeladene Inszenierung der Gestik'.¹⁴ In a number of emblems, the soul uses gestures with fixed, symbolic significance to express her willingness to be guided. Examples of these traditional gestures of devotion, prayer or awe are the hands crossed before the chest,

¹¹ Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, New Accents, ed. Terence Hawkes (London; New York: Methuen, 1980) 2.

¹² Herman Roodenburg, *The Eloquence of the Body. Perspectives on Gesture in the Dutch Republic*, Studies in Netherlandish Art and Cultural History, vol. 6 (Zwolle: Waanders, 2004).

¹³ See references to Quintilian, Caussin 1643, and Mallet 1753 in Dene Barnett, *The Art of Gesture. The Practices and Principles of 18th Century Acting* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1987).

¹⁴ Andreas Henning, "Vision und Text - Bildliche Inszenierung der Gestik um 1600," *diss.sense. Zeitschrift für Literatur und Kommunikation* (Tübingen: Narr, 1999), vol. Gestik.

for instance in *Micat inter omnes amor virtutes*,¹⁵ the folded hands, for instance in *A malo tuetur*,¹⁶ and the open submissive hand of for instance *Mentis sol amor dei*.¹⁷ The gestures are often accompanied by a kneeling attitude, for instance in *Amoris merces amplissima*.¹⁸



Fig. 2 *Micat inter omnes amor virtutes*



Fig. 3 *A malo tuetur*



Fig. 4 *Mentis sol amor dei*



Fig. 5 *Amoris merces amplissima*

In other cases, Anima's hand is on her chest, to confirm she is taking a lesson to heart, as in *Gravata respuit*.¹⁹ Usually her gaze is either directed towards Divine Love, to the object he is drawing attention to, or to where he is leading her (for instance in *Amoris umbra invidia*).²⁰

In some cases where she is looking at Divine Love, I take her look to be a silent request for approval, for instance in *Omnia Spernit*.²¹ *Omnia spernit* also shows a characteristic instance of Anima rejecting what she is supposed to reject. It happens six times in all, in five of which Anima uses the left hand or foot, as mentioned above.



Fig. 6 *Omnia spernit*



Fig. 7 *Amoris umbra invidia*

Another very characteristic event in *Omnia Spernit* is Divine Love taking the soul by the hand, leading her forward, while she, as I said, does her best to prove her correct understanding of and compliance with his wishes. Nearly always, she is being led, being guided, being taught, being pointed out things, being protected. When they are touching, if he is not seeking to guide her, she is looking for help or seeking support.

¹⁵ Emblem 41. An 'Inbrunstgestus', a gesture of fervour and deepness according to Georg Weise and Gertrud Otto, *Die religiösen Ausdrucksgebärden des Barock und ihre Vorbereitung durch die italienische Kunst der Renaissance*, Schriften und Vorträge der Württembergischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften. Geisteswissenschaftliche Abt., vol. 5 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1938). The gesture also has a liturgical meaning, according to Moshe Barasch, *Giotto and the Language of Gesture*, Cambridge Studies in the History of Art (Cambridge, London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987). The gesture also appears in the emblems *Nullus liber erit, si quis amare volet* (40) and *Amoris flagellum dulce* (28).

¹⁶ Emblem 21. Also appears in *Ex amore adoptio* (3), *Amoris merces amplissima* (7) and *Sternit iter deo* (33).
¹⁷ Emblem 6. An 'Ergebengheitsgestus' of submission and resignation, according to Weise and Otto, *Die religiösen Ausdrucksgebärden des Barock und ihre Vorbereitung durch die italienische Kunst der Renaissance*.

¹⁸ Emblem 7. Also e.g. in *Animae spes optima nutrix* (30).
¹⁹ Emblem 23. It is a gesture of asseveration and assurance, according to Weise and Otto, *Die religiösen Ausdrucksgebärden des Barock und ihre Vorbereitung durch die italienische Kunst der Renaissance*. It is done using the right hand, according to Barnett, *The Art of Gesture. The Practices and Principles of 18th Century Acting*. It also occurs in e.g. *Amor purus* (10) and *Virtus character amoris* (14).

²⁰ Emblem 25.
²¹ Emblem 46

Anima, I would say, is not just doing what a Catholic soul should do in order to be saved, rather, she is overdoing it, and she is overdoing it for us, in order to make absolutely clear the desirable behaviour. This process is not, I believe, related to the ecstatic rapture that some may find ‘overdone’ in Baroque art.²² Ecstasy or rapture wouldn’t fit at all in Vaenius’ book. What we see is the magnifying process of the emblem at work, enlarging the representation of gestures which it could not actually perform.

The emblem and the audience

How does the presence of the participants influence the relation between emblem picture and viewer? As I argued elsewhere,²³ the behaviour of the Soul and of Divine Love gives an intrapictorial explanation of how the, usually metaphorical, emblematic object is to be understood. In doing so, the pictorial composition also echoes the relationship between the emblem book author and its reader.



Fig. 8 Amor rectus



Fig. 9 Nec vidisse sat est



Fig. 10 Ex amore adoptio



Fig. 11 Omnia vincit amor

To look specifically at how the viewer interacts with the dramatic aspects of the emblem pictures, let us first take a case where the drama is only subtly present, as in *Amor rectus*.²⁴ Anima and Divine Love are holding up a plumb-line for us to see. The first thing to note is that the picture requires our presence, the only way to make sense of the action in the picture is to assume that Anima and Divine Love are holding up the plummet for our inspection.

However static the composition may be, there is nevertheless a number of elements that make the picture more than the sum of its parts. The very fact of Anima and Divine Love being there together, standing next to each other, cooperating, holding the plumb line together, is of course highly significant. That his hand is above hers is also meaningful. The wind that blows up Anima’s and Divine Love’s dresses – representing perhaps God’s life-giving breath – contributes to making this a living event rather than a timeless moment. Anima looks up and extends her hand, presumably directing herself to God.

In this picture both Anima and Amor Divinus are turned towards us, rather than towards each other. This is an extreme position in a continuum, of which another extreme would be Anima and Amor Divinus turned fully towards each other and excluding us. *Nec vidisse sat est*²⁵ comes close to this other extreme, but actually there is a slight opening up between the two lovers, which is of course a way of letting us see, and a concession to the need for theatre. In fact, the characteristic position of the Soul and Divine Love is intermediate: body turned somewhat towards us, face turned more towards each other. Barnett

²² Bert Treffers, *Een hemel op aarde. Extase in de Romeinse barok* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1995).

²³ Peter Boot, "A Mirror to the Eyes of the Mind. Metaphor in Otto van Veen's *Amoris Divini Emblemata* (Antwerp 1615)," *Proceedings of the Emblemata Sacra Conference*, eds. Agnès Guiderdoni-Bruslé, Ralph Dekoninck and Marc van Vaeck ([forthcoming]).

²⁴ Emblem 4.

²⁵ Emblem 47.

discusses this as the ‘technique of double address’,²⁶ which is necessitated by the fact that ostensibly the characters engage with each other, but ultimately of course they always engage with us.

Pictures where Anima and Amor Divinus are not turned towards each other at all are usually those where Anima is turned towards someone else. In *Ex amore adoptio* Anima is turned toward Jesus, and here Amor Divinus is relegated to a supporting role, rather than the leading one. But again, though we have no part in this, all of the characters, Christ included, are turned slightly towards us, because it is for us that they stage the performance.²⁷

It will come as no surprise that even though all action is ultimately for our benefit, the degree in which the protagonists are turned towards each other is also a measure of the degree in we are initially at least excluded. To state one obvious consequence of the protagonists facing each other: it gets harder for one of them to look out of the frame and look at us (as occurs e.g. in *Omnia vincit amor*).²⁸

Drama and the emblematic object

As noted, the introduction of Anima and Divine Love in the emblem pictures brings with it the reference to a larger narrative. This narrative can be construed as the soul’s journey towards mystical union, or alternatively as the soul’s journey towards heaven.²⁹

There are a number of possibilities for the pictorial relationship between the emblematic object and the larger narrative in the emblem.³⁰ We can delineate four broad groupings: (1) the emblems where the main concern is the display of an emblematic object (or concept, or activity), without a significant amount of interaction between the protagonists; (2) emblems that still show an emblematic object, but bring out its significance in the interaction between the pictures’ protagonists; (3) emblems that, in displaying the protagonists’ actions towards an emblematic object, also display an event in the spiritual life of the soul; and finally (4) emblems where one could say that ‘drama takes over’: the significance of the picture is determined by the larger story in which the participants are involved, and any emblematic objects here will be of only secondary importance.

In the first group we find cases where Amor Divinus and Anima together show an object to the viewer. We already saw a case like that in *Amor rectus*.³¹ The picture is inconceivable without the supposition of an audience that is shown the emblematic object. Similar are the cases where Divine Love and the Soul together symbolize a single concept, as for instance the concept of mutuality in *Sit in amore recipratio*.³² Again, the pictures where Divine Love and the Soul act jointly against a vice, as in *Odit moras*, share the characteristic of the participants showing a meaningful object or activity to the viewer.³³ Interaction between the participants is here typically limited, as the main thrust of communication is directed towards the viewer.

²⁶ Barnett, *The Art of Gesture. The Practices and Principles of 18th Century Acting*. p. 435-440.

²⁷ It would have been rude for a theatre actor to play with his side or back to the audience.

²⁸ Emblem 42. Also e.g. in *In unitate perfectio* (11).

²⁹ Anne Buschhoff, *Die Liebesemblemata des Otto van Veen. Die Amorum Emblemata (1608) und die Amoris Divini Emblemata (1615)* (Bremen: Hauschild, 2004).

³⁰ For another analysis of how the addition of protagonists and setting may change the functioning of an emblematic object, see Agnès Guiderdoni-Bruslé, "La métamorphose des objets dans les emblèmes sacrés. Les marqueurs du processus emblématique," *Florilegio de Estudios de Emblematica. A Florilegium of Studies on Emblematics. Actas del VI Congreso Internacional de The Society for Emblem Studies. Proceedings of the 6th International Conference of the Society for Emblem Studies. A Coruña, 2002*, ed. Sagrario López Poza (Ferrol: Sociedad de Cultura Valle Inclán, 2004).

³¹ Emblem 4. Similar cases are *In unitate perfectio* (11), *Amor purus* (10) and *Ab uno amore multa bona* (27)

³² Emblem 13. The same occurs in *Pia amoris lucta* (12) and *In spiritu seminat* (22).

³³ Emblem 31; similarly in *Superbiam odit* (53).



Fig. 12 *Sit in amore reciprocatio*



Fig. 13 *Odit moras*



Fig. 14 *Iucundum spirat odorem*



Fig. 15 *Virtus character amoris*

In the second group, the interaction between Divine Love and the soul highlights the importance of the emblematic object. That is what happens when Divine Love gives the soul something for her consideration (the vessel of perfume in *Iucundum spirat odorem*) or is pointing at something for her benefit (*Virtus character amoris*).³⁴ In a variation on this procedure, Divine Love may help the soul in an activity where she is engaged in, and thus express his support of and the importance of that activity (for instance in building the Christian life in *Amor aedificat*).



Fig. 16 *Amor aedificat*



Fig. 17 *Pietate in parentes potior*



Fig. 18 *Sternit iter deo*

In somewhat more complex form, a number of pictures represent a choice of some kind between different objects. A good example is *Pietate in parentes potior*, where the choice is between the storks, representing parental love, and the crucifix.³⁵ In this case, the choice is between something good and something better; in the example of *Gravata respuit* the choice is between good and evil, heaven and earth.³⁶

The third group contains emblems where the focus has moved away from the emblematic object towards an event on the spiritual journey of the soul. *Amoris merces amplissima* for instance depicts a scene where the soul is being rewarded; the emblematic object (the laurel crown) is just an ingredient in this scene and not in itself an object for contemplation.³⁷ The picture shows a scene from the drama rather than an object or activity to contemplate. Similarly, in *Sternit iter deo*,³⁸ though the road between God and man, mentioned in the motto and identified in the epigrams with Divine Love, is visible in the picture, its pictorial significance is largely taken away by the encounter of Jesus and the soul for which the road provides the setting.

Lastly, the fourth group contains the emblems where the *pictura* focuses on an allegorical depiction of crucial events in the spiritual life of the soul. There are still metaphorically significant objects, but they play only a minor role. In the emblem

³⁴ Emblems 37 and 14 respectively. See also *Superna respicit* (16).

³⁵ Emblem 18.

³⁶ Emblem 23. Other emblems representing a choice: *Omnia spernit* (46), *Amoris felicitas* (51).

³⁷ Emblem 7.

³⁸ Emblem 33.

Incipiendum Divine Love and the soul set out on their spiritual journey.³⁹ In a sense, the scene is repeated in *Sine amore mors*, where Divine Love approaches the soul that is spiritually dead because she lives without Divine Love. Similarly, *Ex amore adoptio* shows an allegorical representation of God's adoption of the soul where metaphoric objects only appear on a second plane.⁴⁰ A subgroup of these emblems are alike in that they picture the dangers that the Christian soul may encounter and the protection offered by Divine Love. In *A malo tuetur* Divine Love has slain the enemies of the soul and further protects her with his shield.⁴¹ The significance of the pictura is in the protection he affords her, and in the willingness to be protected that she displays.



Fig. 19 *Incipiendum*



Fig. 20 *Sine amore mors*

Emblem texts

In his article on speech bubbles in emblems, Laurence Grove has pointed out that ‘emblematic works that have speech bubbles are generally those that have something to sell, and this most commonly is a religious belief’.⁴² Grove argues that the conjunction of the intimacy of dialogue and the immediacy of the image in speech bubble emblems is a way of drawing the viewer into the conversational exchange.

Now, speech bubbles express direct speech and possibly dialogue, and in the emblem one would look for these primarily in the subscription. In the subscriptions of *Amoris divini emblemata* the amount of direct speech, let alone dialogue, is minimal. Most of the epigrams contain commentary rather than text spoken by the participants. Even thus, the theatrical analogy need not break down, as many theatre genres, like the early cinema, employ commentators or *bonimenteurs*.⁴³ Interestingly, however, there is an 18th century adaptation of *Amoris divini emblemata* by Jan Suderman, who wrote new epigrams (in Dutch) to go with the mottoes and pictures of Vaenius’ book.⁴⁴ In his preface, Suderman declares he has tried to give speech to the ‘silent poetry’ of the pictures, and that he has avoided reading the original texts. While in Vaenius’ vernacular epigrams usually the speaker cannot be identified with the either the soul or Divine Love, in Suderman’s texts about half of the epigrams is spoken by the soul, usually addressing Jesus.⁴⁵ Four subscriptions are explicitly marked as dialogues between Jesus and the soul.

³⁹ Emblem 2.

⁴⁰ Emblem 3.

⁴¹ Emblem 21. Similar cases in *Amoris umbra invidia* (25) and *Amoris securitas* (38).

⁴² Laurence Grove, "Emblems with Speech Bubbles," *Visual Words and Verbal Pictures. Essays in Honour of Michael Bath*, eds. Alison Saunders and Peter Davidson, Glasgow Emblem Studies (Glasgow: Department of French, University of Glasgow, 2005).

⁴³ Cf. W. M. H. Hummelen, "Het tableau vivant, de ‘toog’, in de toneelspelen van de rederijkers," *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 108 (1992), André Gaudreault and Germain Lacasse, *Le bonimenteur de vues animées = the moving picture lecturer*, *Iris*, vol. 22 (Iowa City, IA etc.: Institute for Cinema and Culture, 1996).

⁴⁴ Jan Suderman, *De godlievende ziel vertoont in zinnebeelden door Herman Hugo en Otto van Veen met dichtkunstige verklaringen van Jan Suderman* (Amsterdam: Henrik Wetstein, 1724). The book also contains adaptations of Hugo’s *Pia Desideria*.

⁴⁵ Suderman does not seem to distinguish between Divine Love and Christ.

If there is indeed a parallel between Vaenius' emblems and theatre scenes, what Suderman does, for those four pictures, is to provide us with a possible stage text for the protagonists. In for instance *Amor docet*, he has Divine Love explain to the soul the importance of the narrow gate depicted in the background of the picture. The soul answers that she '... hear[s] and write[s] down your dear lessons, my bridegroom', and exclaims she will enter that gate at whatever cost. Divine Love then says the gate is wide enough for those that have laid down their earthly burdens. The very simplicity and plainness of the exchange is the best proof that the remarks are meant for the audience rather than for the primary recipients.

In the dialogue to *Amor rectus*, the soul exclaims to Jesus 'My Beloved, that this painting may instruct me.' The 'painting' (*schildery*) that the soul refers to is, surprisingly, the plummet-line. The soul exclaims, within the emblem, what the devotee reader may have been hoped to exclaim outside of it. In the dialogue to *Pietate in parentes potior*, referring to Jesus' finger pointing at the crucifix, the soul says 'So it is, my Love. Your finger shows me the pains you have suffered.' Again, the added text spells out what is implicit in the picture, the soul's awareness of Jesus' suffering. The soul therefore, in Suderman's interpretations of these pictures, plays the part that I believe Vaenius already assigned her – in the process also demonstrating to the readers the script they have to follow.

Outlook

Van Veen's religious emblem book is unique in its thematic unity and pictorial consistency. These qualities are, to some extent, what makes an analysis along the preceding lines possible. Another element that may make such an analysis especially relevant in the case of Van Veen is his training as a painter and experience in representing complex compositions and human emotions. In later books of religious love emblems, such as Hugo's *Pia desideria*, *Amoris divini et humani antipathia* or Luyken's *Jezus en de ziel*, heavily influenced by Van Veen as they were, the gestures, looks and behaviour of Divine Love and the soul seem harder to read than in the case of Van Veen.

This is not to say a theatrical analysis of these and other emblem books would be pointless, on the contrary. Human or human-like figures in emblem pictures, as soon as they begin to interact among themselves or with the spectators, become vehicles for shades of meaning that merit analysis. They create a potential for an inner *Nachvollziehung* of the emblem's lesson, through identification with the protagonists and immersion in the dramatic situation.

The pictures of Jan Luyken would provide an interesting subject for further study. Of special interest will be the emblems of Pieter Huygen, where Luyken provided the pictures to which Huygen wrote the texts.⁴⁶ As Vinken has shown, Huygen did not always fully understand Luyken's intentions and these misunderstandings concern, among other things, the part played by the ubiquitous spectators Luyken included in the pictures.⁴⁷ Vinken makes clear that the spectators have the formal role of guiding the eye into the pictures, but that they also represent us – the book's pious readers, the spectators outside of the frame. For some reason though he considers this to be a non-literary, purely stylistic matter. However, that Luyken should have wanted devote and pious characters for his spectators is surely not just a

⁴⁶ Pieter Huygen, *De beginselen van Gods koninkryk in den mensch uitgedrukt in zinnebeelden*. (Amsterdam: Wed. P. Arentsz, 1689). The book is available on the Internet on <http://emblems.let.uu.nl/emblems/html/hu1689front.html>.

⁴⁷ Pierre Jacques Vinken, "Aan d'overkant, is 't zalig land," *Levende talen* 205 (1960).

question of style. Here, as in the theatre, it is true that ‘all that is on the stage is a sign’.⁴⁸ The spectators stand and look and even move in ways that are meaningful, they make gestures and they interact. If Huygen has read these signs incorrectly, he is still their earliest interpreter.

In Luyken’s own emblems, we might want to look at the abstract form of dialogue we encounter in *Jesus en de ziel* (‘Jesus and the soul’).⁴⁹ Here the epigrams are usually spoken by the soul, and are followed by a scriptural quotation which Luyken headed ‘Divine response’. Without this ‘divine response’ we might not even have conceived of these emblem texts as dialogues. In most cases, the Bible quotation does indeed seem to answer a concern raised by the soul in the epigram. To be able to see the emblem text as a dialogue, as a text therefore that is performed in front of us, brings out the double addressee of the text. It makes apparent that no text is ever as thoroughly lyrical as it appears at first glance, and that the phenomenon of theatricality may be more widespread than we tend to recognize.

⁴⁸ Veltruský, quoted in Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* 7.

⁴⁹ Jan Luyken, *Jesus en de ziel* (Amsterdam: P. Arentsz., 1685). The book is available on the Internet on <<http://emblems.let.uu.nl/emblems/html/lu1685front.html>>. Besides the epigram and divine response, the emblem text also contains another bible quotation (placed below the picture), a prose commentary, and sometimes other texts. A divine (or ‘sacred’) response also occurs in the emblems in Luyken’s *Goddelyke Liefde-vlammen* and *Vonken der liefde Jezus*.

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