Jesuit Emblems

Emblems were distinctly preferred by the Jesuits, who produced more emblem books (in all the major European vernacular languages, as well as in Latin) than did any other identifiable group of writers, employing them in their ministries of education and preaching, and to disseminate Ignatian spirituality.

Ignatian spirituality insists that the ordinary fabric of everyday life abounds with a deeper hidden meaning, for the finite and the quotidian are the privileged places of encounter with God. This correction is summed up in the leitmotif of the Ignatian maxims, “Finding God in all things.” In other words, just as in emblems, where meaning in hidden or concealed or needed to be decoded through strategic “reading,” in Ignatian spirituality reality must be decoded and transformed into a “spiritual painting” that points to the real reality.

The design, composition, and structure of the general criticism of emblems was also an integral part of the educational curriculum of Jesuit colleges, specifically in the area of rhetoric (the emblem was considered an image figure, then part of the rhetorical doctrine of trope).

The privileged place of emblems in Jesuit pedagogy was rooted in the time-honored belief that in the learning process the eye was the most important sense organ, and hence that visual images, such as emblems, have a deeper and longer-lasting effect on the memory than words, especially when the subject matter is embodied. It becomes easier to grasp and to commit to memory by decoding the matter as a reader-viewer, it can be assimilated more easily and lastingly.

Thus, the emblem was intrinsically related to the education system whose purpose was not simple retention, but creative composition, which put the mind “in play,” provided new thought, and resulted in “making” new things. This process entailed crafted memorable images, namely, emotionally heightened images (Blissely, resplendent, monstrous, thrilling, inspiring), or everyday images put into unexpected contexts.

How do emblems work in practice? The task of “emblematicating” a subject, or representing it in a visually aesthetic form, is a way of expressing it in emblematic form, not involving decoding, but recoding it. An emblem combined these elements (1) an illustration with a title or motto, and (2) a poem, with or without commentary (subscripture) (see Figure 2). For the viewer, the emblem presents an emblemic image that can be deciphered only by discovering the link between it and the apparently unrelated motto. The emblematic contribution is the use of old materials to make something new: the variation, adaptation, and personalization of existing emblems (derived from a wide variety of sources, such as zoological, botanical, natural history, astrology, commonplace proverbial, popular wisdom, emblem books, etc.) to transform the symbolic system.

The emblematic compositional or encoding process “remodelling” these older materials in a way that the viewer between the visual image and the motto forms a new meaning.

The striking similarities between tattoo imagery and emblem books with captions identifying the places, persons, and events depicted are subsequently adopted by many religious diocesan and emblem books.

Some motifs in tattoo art resemble how popular patterns and images familiar from the emblem books have survived in popular imagery. The tendency to adorn tattooed images with inscriptions and mottoes is also remarkable.

Emblematics and Modern Tattoos

This religious emblem depicts a winged human heart [the soul] according to the teachings of Doctor of Office (1600) from a devil. A snake winding through the veins of a shell of sun is a popular apocryphal emblems from the early 17th century.

Some motifs in tattoo art resemble how popular patterns and images familiar from the emblem books have survived in popular imagery. The tendency to adorn tattooed images with inscriptions and mottoes is also remarkable.

At first sight one might assume that tattoos and emblems have little in common, but a closer look is revealing. At a Tattoo Convention I looked at artist's pattern books which are intended to attract new customers. One of the photographs showed a hand with an open eye tattooed in the middle of the palm.

We encounter the same motif of the eye set in the hand in emblem books, where it usually conveys a warning to be careful and not to trust too easily. As in Zenzinger's emblem Oculata fides [Trust guarded with the eyes] in George Wither's Cutie coupe; but, then, well balanced. The hand reaching out is usually means trust and fidelity, while the open eye indicates precaution or circumspection. The specific combination of the two motifs indicates a unique moral, and it is not likely that the tattoo artist who intended or rather re-invented the image had the same idea or intention in mind. However one might claim that the process of “finding” the image is not far removed from the emblematic mode of combining instead images of symbolic value to form a new, original and surprising picture.

Emblematic Motif in Pattern Books for Tattoos

From an examination of tattoo pattern books, a specific typology of images can be established that bears resemblance to motif categories in emblem compilations. Although these images are short of their original context, and in spite of the intricate classification they underwent in the following centuries, some motifs have survived that were also very popular in 16th- and 17th-century emblem books. For example, the anchor as a sign of Christian hope became a symbol of seaward and navigation in many places in Europe, and the heart is certainly one of the most popular emblems in emblems and applied emblems.

Another important parallel can be found in the way some tattoo images are pictures of handshakes, sometimes combined with the image of the heart, to depict the authority of the older image and to link between it and the apparently unrelated motto. The emblematic contribution is the use of old materials to make something new: the variation, adaptation, and personalization of existing emblems (derived from a wide variety of sources, such as zoological, botanical, natural history, astrology, commonplace proverbial, popular wisdom, emblem books, etc.) to transform the symbolic system.

The Authority of Images: the relationship between tattoos and emblems are by its means accidental. Such images fulfill two purposes at the same time. On the one hand, the old values are evolved and remembered, but on the other hand, the new meaning is connected to the authority of the older image and is strengthened by being compared with it.

Whether or not images found in modern tattoos derive directly from emblem images is not certain, but often such an obvious and strange resemblance, it is obvious that many of these images, especially the heart emblems in combination with other emblems are popular for exactly the same reasons that they appealed to readers of 17th-century emblem compilations.

The earliest and most visible of Jesuit emblem books was Jerome Nadal's Emblemata Sacra, published in the proper way (it is what we might term "proto-emblematic"), this important work set out the visual steps in Ignatian meditation and is the first emblematic creation by a Jesuit. Nadal's method of assigning letters (A, B, C) to the different dimensions of the Gospel scene that was key to captions identifying the places, persons, and events depicted was subsequently adopted by many religious diocesan and emblem books.

Emblemata Sacra

How did early Jesuits take notes?

Like other aspects of Jesuit pedagogy, the use of notebooks would become normalized in the 1550s-60s through written guidelines for the colleges and circular memoranda. These sources reveal a culture of note-taking inculcated in Jesuit education, which valued and acquired knowledge. It is no surprise that Polanco, mastermind of the Jesuit educational experiment, was the pivotal force behind the implementation of standardized note-taking techniques in the Society.

**Note-Taking and Mission**

Jesuits were expected to invest a considerable amount of time outside class in maintaining their notebooks. This is likely a modified form of late medieval pedagogical practice carried over from the manuscript age. Of more direct relevance is the relative wide-spread availability of cheap paper in the late middle ages. Teaching Methods and Student Learning Techniques. Didactic and student copying were still used as a means of providing students with terms throughout the sixteenth century. Prior to the widespread availability of cheap paper in the late middle ages, most students used reusable media such as wax tablets.

**Composing the Lecture**

Composing, the practice of copying excerpts into a thematically or logically organized notebook under designated heading or text, became widespread over the course of the sixteenth century. Of more direct relevance is the relatively self-documented practice of recording lecture notes in the margins of printed books. This is likely a modified form of late medieval pedagogical practice carried over from the manuscript age.

**Modus parvisius**

The essential elements of Jesuit technique were no doubt acquired by Ignatius, Cajetan, Polanco and others as part of the novice parvisius, the teaching methods of the Parisian colleges which so strongly influenced the first generation of Jesuits. Students were expected to invest a considerable amount of time outside class in maintaining their notebooks and adding supplementary material.

**Note-Taking and Mission**

It is no surprise that Polanco, mastermind of the Jesuit student,laid in Rome, was also one of the principle forces behind the implementation of standardized note-taking techniques in the colleges. These techniques would also later serve as the basis for the collected notebooks for a lifetime. By the 17th century, a host of other activities in which techniques of observation and description, redaction and recall might be called upon.

“Furnishing” the Student Notebooks

The College curriculum, humanities and rhetoric students spent time outside class burnishing for use in their rhetorical compositions. They were encouraged to copy into their notebooks examples, comparisons, testimonies, sentences, proverbs and other things “of manifold erudition which might enrich and embellish orations.” The student notebook consequently assumed the form of a collection of notes or glosses on a course text. Lectures furnished one source of information, but consultation of additional materials was chiefly normal practice in stocking the notebook.

**Notebooks for a Lifetime**

The other significant feature of the summary is its anticipated use outside the immediate didactic context. While the colleges eventually taught both Jesuit and non-Jesuit students, it is worthwhile recalling that the colleges originated in the Society’s need to train Jesuits for ministry. Basic technique of reading, note-taking, and summarizing thus aimed to provide individual Jesuits with the tools which would enable them to fulfill the spiritual mission of the Society. Above all, preaching and public lectures are singled out in the Constitutions. In this regard the summary had little to do with the ministry of an academic subject. As such, instead, was the long-term service such collections of notes could provide in a lifetime of preaching and lecturing.

**A System Without Parallel**

The discussion of note-taking techniques which occurred within the early Society in parallel in the history of education. There is no similar body of evidence for medieval universities and colleges or other early modern institutions.

**17th-Century Jesuit Student Notebooks**

Students themselves inventively created similar emblematic structures. An interesting example in this respect is the set of seven didactic notebooks by Van Cantelbeeck (1669-70). Van Cantelbeeck bought five emblematic dictation prints from Hayé and others by the famous French engraver Jacques Callot (1592-1635). The Callot prints are often inserted in the didactic notes as in this respect is the set of seven didactic notebooks by Van Cantelbeeck (1669-70). Van Cantelbeeck (1669-70). Van Cantelbeeck is illustrated by a goblet (bunchback) lifting a drinking cup (Figure 1). In one of Van Cantelbeeck’s didactic, an engraving from the Hayé Engelgrave series (Figure 3) served as a model for Van Cantelbeeck’s own drawing, namely, for the representation of a solare table, now provided with the text “effluit hora diesque” (hours and days pass by) (Figure 4).

The success of Hayé’s series of emblematic engravings and the way in which university students made use of them in an inventive way may be illustrated by the college dictation noted in 1470 by Michael van den Biesen, a student in the college “Het varken” (The Pig). During the lectures of Professor Johannes Bureum (c. 1640-1718), van den Biesen made a drawing demonstrating the superiority of his college (The Pig) over the three others (The Lily, The Castle, and The Falcon). The success of this imprint-like representation shown is a proof opening its hooles on a collapsing castle. At the same time, it reads on the falcon and devours the lilies on the hill (Figure 2).