

On the Dramatic Nature of the Most Famous English Emblem-Collection Francis Quarles: Emblemes, 1635

Whenever one deals with the religious authors of the 16th–17th century England, Hungary or other countries, a very painful and unjust „School of Abuse”-like attitude appears in the majority of contemporary evaluations, at least on the „short history of X literature” level. Apart from John Donne and a few other major poets all these writers are treated as second-rate citizens of the *Respublica Litteraria*. Let me mention a recent example, Andrew Sanders’ *The Short History of English Literature*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996. In the chapter dedicated to *Metaphysical Religious Poetry* some relatively useful material can be read about Francis Quarles, but – as usually – followed by expressions of clear-cut disdain: „A similar spiritual cross fertilization is evident in the popularity (the author refers here to the Jesuit influence on the English emblems) of emblem books in seventeenth-century England... Francis Quarles’s *Emblemes, Divine and Morall* (1635) proved to be the most popular book of verse of its age. Quarles (1592–1644) and his engraver took and, where Protestant occasion demanded, adapted plates from Jesuit emblem books, only the disappointingly pedestrian accompanying poems were original...”¹

„Pedestrian” is a cheap and misleading attribute, if we are patient enough to clarify the intellectual background of the Quarlesian emblems. The road leads first not to Rome, but to Germany, first of all to the capital of the Palatinate, to Heidelberg. Quarles’s eyes and mind were opened to an emblematic way of thinking and arguing in 1613 when he was one of Princess Elizabeth’s cupbearers at her pompous and highly theatrical wedding with Frederick V., the Elector Palatine. This very event was celebrated by all the principal poets of the day, including *An Epithalamion or Marriage Song on the Lady Elizabeth and Count Palatine being married on St Valentines day* by

¹ Andrew SANDERS, *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996, 201.

no lesser poet than John Donne.² The theatrical-pictorial nature of this international feast is described by Donne vividly and humorously, with some sharp critical remarks. He warns the newly-wedded couple from becoming the cheap spectacle of the „mob”, in a humiliating circus-like situation, instead of understanding the real content of their union:

„ And why do you two walke
 So slowly pac'd in this procession?
 Is all your care but to be look'd upon,
 And be to others spectacle, and talke?
 The feast, with gluttonous delaies,
 Is eaten, and too long theit meat they praise,
 The masquers come too late, and I thinke, will stay,
 Like Fairies, till the cock crow them away.”³

These are perhaps the best lines of this otherwise not very remarkable nuptial song which is overburdened by mythological commonplaces. One thing is sure: the town of Heidelberg offered an extremely moveable and vivid feast to the actual guests and to the wider European public. The official chronicle of the pompous events was written by a certain Tobias Hübner who came from Halle, studied law at the University of Heidelberg, served at several German princely courts (Anhalt, Dessau, etc.). He was also a polyglott, a learned poet-member of the so-called Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft (Fruit-bringing Society) and – first of all – a specialist of the art of tournaments – again a highly theatrical-visual activity. His chronicle – entitled *Festchronik* – was published straight after the colourful events, illustrated by the famous de Bry brothers. As Götz Schmitz wrote: „His collection is a large quarto with magnificent engravings of triumphal arches

² John DONNE, *Selected Poetry*, ed., int. by John HAYWARD, Penguin Books, 1950, 90–94.

³ Ibid.

and tournaments... the volumes contain descriptions in various languages of very different events, such as tilts and fireworks, masques and processions, all along the princely route, not only in London and Heidelberg, but also in the Netherlands and in Catholic cities such as Cologne and Mainz.”⁴

The above mentioned collection looked like some comics or animated cartoons on the historical event, full of happenings and gestures. The intention of Hübner and the various illustrators was – among others – to prove the significance of the continental (mostly of the German) sources and personalities in the unquestionable victory of the Protestant cause. The salutation and the good wishes of the Heidelberg theologians is expressed by an engraving which depicts the glorious ship-like triumphal arch of the faculty, with the „Holy Trinity” of Luther, Melanchton and Bèze in the centre.⁵ Quarles certainly had to be familiar with this rich collection and also with the numerous *Emblemata* produced and spread in Germany. The basic handbook of Arthur Henkel and Albrecht Schöne proves the rich cult of emblems in Germany. The germ of this tradition (not only in Germany, but all over the world) was the *Emblemata* of Andrea Alciato (or Alciatus) who sent his book to Augsburg, to his German friend, Konrad Pentiger. He – without even asking the author – immediately produced an illustrated pirate-edition of it in the year 1531. The official German version of Jeremias Held appeared in Frankfurt am Main, in 1567. From this time on an invasion of emblem-books began in Germany, by Jacobus Bruck, Raphael Custos, Peter Iselburg, Gabriel Rollenhagen, Julius Wilhelm Zingref and others.⁶

Another possible model of Quarles was Cesare Ripa (1560–1623), by his civil name Giovanni Campari who was the kitchen-chef and cup-bearer of cardinal Salviati. Consequently: a double colleague of Quarles himself within

⁴ <http://www.uni-bonn.de/Anglistik/research/circe/cir-pala.htm>, compiled by Götz SCHMITZ

⁵ HÜBNER, Tobias, *Beschreibung der Reiss ,Empfählung des Ritterlichen Ordens,... Des Durchleuchtigsten... Herrn Friedrichen des Fünften*, Gotthardt Vögelin, Heidelberg, 1613, <http://www.uni-mannheim.de/mateo/desbillons/reis.html>

⁶ For further references see Tamas SAJO’s *Introduction* to Cesare RIPA’s *Iconologia*, Balassi Kiadó, 1997, 631. and A. HENKEL – A. SCHÖNE’s *Emblemata, Handbuch zur*

and outside the realm of art. To be a cup-bearer or a kitchen-master of a royal household or serving a member of the high clergy: are both occupations or some theatrical and pictorial content and behaviour, with a constant demand for make-belief, for wearing a mask in front of an audience⁷ and – last, but not least – with an expectation of a dramatic coreography, very often with the attitudes of a dancer. We can remember this seemingly unimportant coincidence when reading and watching Ripa's and Quarles's highly dynamic emblems.

Returning to the circles of Heidelberg once more: this town had to be a formative factor in Quarles's literary career from numerous aspects. Let me mention just a few of them: the female figures of these emblems are usually depicted with a touch of sarcasm: possibly the questionable behaviour of Elizabeth Stuart, the poor Queen of Hearts influenced him so negatively. Elizabeth who was charged of levity and light-heartedness by the citizens of Prague, the Winter Queen who became the subject of a violent vivisection of a contemporary German preacher-poet-dramatist of Jesuit education, Jacobus Balde (1604–1668). He was also present at the wedding: his bitter and highly critical Latin poem on Elizabeth (it was almost like a political pamphlet) became widely known and cited in Europe. Some extremely sharp lines appeared in it on her greed for a royal position. An attitude which finally led to the disaster of the Thirty Years War: „As my father is a king, I'd also wish to be a king's wife, my beloved husband...”⁸ Hermann Wiegand's introductory lines to the *Parnassus Palatinus* are also worth quoted: „The Protestant Heidelberg – from the second part of the 16th century until the beginning of the 17th – until the fatal end of the Bohemian adventure – was one of the centres of the European humanist culture.”⁹

Sinnbildkunst des XVI.–XVII. Jahrhunderts, Verlag J. B. Metzler, Stuttgart–Weimar, 1996, 34, 37.

⁷ Ibid. 635.

⁸ *Parnassus Palatinus, Humanistische Dichtung in Heidelberg und in der alten Kurpfalz*, herausgegeben von Wilhelm KÜHLMANN und Hermann WIEGAND, Manutius Verlag, Heidelberg, 1988, 217.

⁹ Ibid. 5.

Let me close the Quarles versus Germany unit of my survey with two further references both showing the peculiar attitude of the intellectuals of this country as far as the pictorial-emblematic-dramatic way of thinking and arguing is concerned. A Hungarian expert of old Hungarian literature, prof. Sandor Ivan Kovacs emphasizes the significance of the German iconophile manners as undoubtedly influential factors in the highly visual oeuvre of Albert Szenci Molnar. He was one of our greatest Calvinist reformers who married a German woman and spent more than 30 years in Germany,¹⁰ mainly within the borders of the Palatinate. He was not a practising emblemist, but decorated the frontispiece of his translation of Calvin's *Institutions* with a highly emblematic engraving. A miniature drama – namely a short dialogue between Man and Religion is also attached to the Preface, which – written in hexameter – unveils the meaning of the puzzle-like cover illustration. But, as a counter-example – prof. Kovacs also mentions that the Winter King (in 1619) behaved in Prague as a professional iconoclast and gave order to expurgate the cathedral from the altars, painting, relics and other ornaments...¹¹

The other important reference came to me from an article by Gabor Tüskés, one of the fathers of contemporary Hungarian emblem-studies. He mentions in it with great reverence that one copy of the *Emblemata* of the Hungarian Joannes Sambucus (Antwerp, 1564) was found in Goethe's library bound together with a 1580 edition of Alciato (remember: the fellow-cup-bearer of our Quarles). It proves the continuity of interest in the art of emblems and also the duration of their influence in Germany.¹²

As – thanks to such Quarles-scholars as Karl Joseph Höltgen and John Harden – this world-famous collection was analyzed from various aspects, emphasizeing – among other facts – its interconfessional nature, therefore it

¹⁰ SZENCI MOLNAR Albert, *Válogatott művei (Selected Writings)*, Magvető, Budapest, 1976, 390, 404–405.

¹¹ Sandor Ivan KOVACS, *Szenci Molnar redivivus*, Ister, Budapest, 2000, 100, 126.

¹² Gabor TUSKES, *Imitation and Adaptation in: Late Humanist Emblematic Poetry: Zsamboky (Sambucus) and Whitney Emblematica* 11 (2001) 265–266.

was not easy to find some still unrevealed or less over-discussed nuances.¹³ The first somehow hidden fact of some importance is not about Quarles himself, but his creative partner, the very often unjustly neglected illustrator, William Marshall. His share in the dramatic and at the same time playful, sometimes almost opera-buffa-like Quarles collection becomes undoubted, if we look into another work of his (or rather a double work): a laudatory poem and a very theatrical Arcadian portrait to Robert Herrick's poems. We know from one of prof. Höltgen's publications that Quarles and Herrick were both educated in Cambridge, were neighbours at the parish of St. Vedast for a time and were contemporaries at the Inns of Court as well, with a number of lawyer friends who may have been mutual acquaintances.¹⁴ Marshall's short laudatory poem is full of platitudes, but there is one single line among the uninteresting ones which throws light upon the methodology of his illustrations to the *Emblemes* as well:

„Admisces Antiqua Novis, Iucunda Severis.”

„You are mixing old things with new ones, playful ones with severes.”¹⁵

The very same duality, the mixing of tragic and comic elements is the secret of the *Emblemes*'s world-wide reception and long-lasting success. Marshall's small visual contribution to Herrick's poems is a brief, but excellent summary of his other, more significant artistic effort: Herrick's solemn bust, the half-angelic, half-wild dancing nymphs, the floating cherubs and Pegasus, the winged horse of poetry remind us of the pictorial and verbal local colour of the *Emblemes* though it totally lacks any biblical-religious allusions. On watching this small illustration Aby M. Warburg's words come to our mind about: „The vulgar-Latin of the pathetic gestures which was easily

¹³ They edited and introduced the latest modern edition of the *Emblemes*, at the Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim, Zürich, New York, 1993.

¹⁴ Karl Joseph HÖLTGEN, *Herrick, the Wheeler family and Quarles*, *Review of English Studies* N.S. 16 (1965) 399-405

¹⁵ *The Lyrical Poems of Robert Herrick*, ed. by Ernest RHYS, J. M. Dent, Aldine House, undated, with the author's portrait and a laudatory poem by William Marshall.

understood everywhere, apart from belonging to one nation or to the other.” (Warburg described this non-verbal international communication in his essay on Albrecht Dürer)¹⁶

Yes, the rich, almost ballet-like gestures appearing in Marshall’s pictorial world greatly saved the Quarlesian text from a quick and early oblivion, from becoming rusty and dusty. Taking all these facts into consideration we can hardly understand such an editorial anti-bravado (fiasco) as Charles Cowden Clarke’s castrated, un-illustrated Edinburgh edition of the *Emblemes* in 1868.

Poor Quarles, how innocently he wrote to the reader: „An Emblem is but a silent parable. Let not the tender eye check, to see the allusion to our blessed SAVIOUR figured in these types. In Holy Scripture He is sometimes called a sower; sometimes a Fisher; sometimes a Physician. And why not presented so as well to the eye as to the ear? Before the knowledge of letters, God was known by hierloglyphics. And indeed what are the heavens, the earth, nay, every creature, but Hieroglyphics and Emblems of His glory? I have no more to say; I wish thee as much pleasure in the reading as I had in the writing. Farewell, reader. Francis Quarles.”¹⁷

These lines addressed to the Reader are not like an introduction to a collection of poems, but rather like a prologue to a theatrical performance. Quarles’s dramatic vein was recognized even by his contemporaries; we learn from Charles Cowden Clarke’s rather acceptable memoir and elaborated critical dissertation that from 1639 until his death Quarles had a position very similar to that of a director of an open-air theatre-festival in our days: „Evidence, however, has been produced to show that he was appointed in 1639, at the request of the Earl of Dorset, Chronologer to the City of London, and continued to exercise the duties of that office until the day of his death. These consisted chiefly in providing pageants for the Lord Mayor, at certain

¹⁶ Aby M. WARBURG, *Selected Essays, Dürer and the Italian Antiquity*, in *Selected Essays*, Balassi Kiadó– Hungarian High School of Fine Arts, 1995, 152.

¹⁷ Francis QUARLES, *Emblemes*, William MARSHALL Sculpsit, Printed by G. M. and sold at John Marriot’s shop in St Dunstan’s Church Yard, Fleet Street, London, 1635, A 3v.

fixed periods.”¹⁸ In other words: his verbal and pictorial paper-theatre got new dimensions through this activity, his very often stage-design-like emblems became sonorous. While speaking about stage designs, let me mention a coincidental parallelism between my most favourite Quarles-emblem (Book 5, No. XI.) a rather free paraphrase of Psalm 42 and a late 17th or early 18th century Jesuit stage design from our so-called Sopron Collection.¹⁹ (In the centre of this picture we can see Diana’s triumphal cart which sits on a cloud drawn by two deer. These two noble animals show energy and seem to be at the start of a victorious gallop. William Simpson’s engraving to Quarles’ words show also a deer, just about to jump, functioning as a trained horse, with the panting soul (personified as an almost child-like young lady) on its back.²⁰

We know from Ripa’s *Iconologia* and from the Henkel–Schöne *Emblemata* that the deer, the stag or the hart was an extremely popular animal in the world of emblems. Ripa mentions it 14 times, while in the Henkel–Schöne collection this very image occupies 8 full pages. Michael Bath even dedicated a whole book to its iconographic significance, namely his *The Image of the Stag*.²¹

The background of this popularity, the stag’s being so overburdened by emblematisers can be partly clarified by Karl Joseph Hölting, at least within the world of English authors. As we know from several sources: Quarles’s model number one was a Jesuit emblem-book, Herman Hugo’s *Pia Desideria* (Antwerp, 1624). Now let me quote Hölting: „Such was the model Francis Quarles secured for his own enterprise. Hugo’s plates were copied with some loss of quality and a few significant alterations by William Marshall and some other English engravers. Quarles managed to recreate the fervent piety of the

¹⁸ *The Poetical Works of Richard Crashaw and QUARLES’ Emblemes*, ed. memoir and critical dissertation by Charles COWDEN CLARKE, William P. Nimmo, Edinburgh, 1868, 189.

¹⁹ *The Sopron Collection of Jesuit Stage Designs* (Eva KNAPP, Istvan KILIAN, Terezia BARDI, Marcello FAGIOLO, ed. by József JANKOVICS, Enciklopédia Publ. House, Budapest, 1999, 228–229.

²⁰ Francis QUARLES, 1635, 285–286.

original in his poetry, which might be described as a popular (but not pedestrian) version of the metaphysical style, full of emotional appeals, antitheses, and homely conceits. The emblematiser has become the emblem poet. The verse, about 2 pages or more, is no longer an appendage to the picture, it can stand as poetry in its own right and often reaches far beyond the contents of the picture. (It's quite the opposite of Saunders's words quoted in my introduction!)²²

Of course, we can't suppose that the Jesuit stage designs of our country were influenced by Quarles and his illustrators. But it can be taken for sure that the Austro-Hungarian Jesuit artists of the late 17th – early 18th centuries were familiar with the material of Herman Hugo's collection. One of the most evident parallels of their equally famous collections are the theatrical light-effects which had a strong psychological influence on their readers-watchers. As René Fülöp wrote: „...die teatralische Lichtführung des Jesuiten“ found its way to England.²³

As for Quarles as a highly influential creative artist: let me mention just one of his disciples, the perhaps most popular one: John Bunyan. Though Quarles himself was a true-born royalist, some critics emphasized his nearness to Puritans and Puritanism. Among others Anthony Wood who called him „an old puritanical poet.”²⁴ What is puritanical in him? Probably the very same homeliness, childishness, richness in actions as that of Bunyan's. The obvious model-emblem to the *Pilgrim's Progress* is the no.2. in the IVth book of the emblems, first of all the 3rd stanza:

„The world's a lab'rinth, whose anfractuious ways
Are all composed of rubs and crook'd meanders:

²¹ Michael BATH, *The Image of the Stag: iconographic themes in western art*, Koerner, Baden-Baden, 1992.

²² Karl Joseph HÖLTGEN, *The Devotional Quality of Quarles's Emblems*, in *Aspects of the Emblem*, ed. by Sir Roy STRONG, Edition Reichenberger, 1986, 44.

²³ René FÜLÖP-MILLER, *Macht und Geheimnis der Jesuiten*, Thomas Knauer Nachfolger Verlag, Berlin, 1929, 253.

²⁴ Karl Joseph Höltgen *ibid.* 37.

No resting here; he's hurried back that stays
 A thought; and he that goes unguided, wanders:
 Her way is dark, her path untrod, unev'n;
 So hard's the way from earth, so hard's the way to heav'n."²⁵

The analogy can't be doubted. And the fact of Bunyan's being so deeply influenced by Quarles indirectly reveals the dramatic qualities of the latter. Several dramatized versions of the *Pilgrim's Progress* are known all over the world, from the opening part of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* in which the 4 sisters perform this Puritan allegory in their „attic-theatre” to the Reformed College of Pápa (Hungary) where the dramatized version of Bunyan's work is the traditional Christmas play even nowadays – as the sign of the renewal of old Protestant theatrical activities.²⁶

Finally, even the memorial verses and portrait of our author prove his contribution to England's theatrical culture. As professor Höltgen wrote in his double-portrait, entitled *Two Francis Quarleses*: „A fitting tribute to Quarles, the poet is the portrait engraved by William Marshall with memorial verses in Latin and English by Alexander Ross and published in *Solomon's Recantation* (1645) the year after his death. It is the best surviving likeness and all later engravings are based on this image.”²⁷ The little epitaph written by Alexander Ross partly throws light on the dual nature of the Quarlesian oeuvre: his gravity, his seriousness in moral teaching and at the same time his intentions to grasp the audience with his sparkling, colourful gemms:

„What heere we see is but a Graven face.
 Only the shaddow of that brittle case
 Wherin were treasur'd up those Gemms which he
 Hath left behind him to Posteritie.”

²⁵ Francis QUARLES, *ibid.* 190. (the 1635 edition)

²⁶ Louisa May ALCOTT, *Little Women*, Heinemann, Oxford, 1997.

William Marshall's engraving – just like in the case of Herrick's above mentioned portrait – is again highly theatrical. It depicts Quarleses triumphant career, his way from the humble hut of artistic efforts to the palace of success which can be considered as a symbol of the *theatrum mundi*.

This very engraving and the related small laudatory poem can be considered as the emblematic summary of my presentation, signifying the theatrical nature of the Quarlesian world. An artistic realm which was strong enough to cross the ocean and become influential even among the strict Puritans of New England who „knew and appreciated the poetry of Herbert, Quarles, Donne and Shakespeare.”²⁸

²⁷ Karl Joseph HÖLTGEN, *Two Francis Quarleses: The Emblem Poet and the Suffolk Parson*, *English Manuscript Studies (1100–1700)* 7, 146–147.

²⁸ KRETZOI Miklósné, *Az amerikai irodalom kezdetei (1607–1750)*, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1976, 352.