



T H E S I G N O F M A N
a study of form in the
historical tragedies of
ANDREAS GRYPHIUS

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A B S T R A C T

In order to understand the philosophy underlying the nature of imagery in Gryphius' tragedies it is necessary to survey the general cultural situation in the seventeenth century. The great tension caused by the transition from a medieval to a modern world order reaches its climactic point during this period. As the medieval world order disintegrates, sixteenth and seventeenth century scholars are building a new metaphysical world order which will afford a 'hold' for a society on the brink of a metaphysical abyss. We must see the most important data of Gryphius' life in the light of this new outlook on the world (pp. 1 - 11).

Whereas formerly the renewal of a metaphysical world order was the task of the theologians, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the pioneers of metaphysical philosophy are found among the scientists, especially the mathematicians. The starting point is the observation of the physical world, for the metaphysical crisis is dominated by

a quest for reality. The dual nature of the universe becomes apparent, and the concept of reflection is introduced in a modified form. This reflection expresses itself not only in the form of mental processes, but also in an awareness of the nature of the universe as being 'reflective', i.e. as an organisation of realities which are each other's 'mirror-images'.

Both these concepts of reflection have their impact on the nature of seventeenth century language and literary art. Individual creative activity is at first less important than 'reflective' art in the form of direct translations from one language into another. At a later stage this concept of translation is carried into the creative activity of the individual literary artist who translates a universe of physical observation into a universe of meaning. The most pure and abstract form of 'reflective' processes is found in Geometry, and here lies the source of the influence of the mathematician on literary form in the seventeenth century. Its most compact literary expression is the Emblem (pp. 12 - 41).

A brief exposé of the form and history of the Emblem is followed by a discussion of its function in literary art. Anticipating later discussion the Emblem is distinguished from the Symbol: the former relies first of all on the physical object, the *Pictura*, and not on the universal, the *Scriptura*. The function of the Emblem is an assertion, or a confirmation, of a 'truth statement'. This assertion is expressed in the comparison of two instances of reality, revealing the tertium comparationis. The comparison of the instances of reality justifies the acceptance of the tertium comparationis as a 'universal truth' applying to all similar instances of reality. In this the distinction between 'Emblem' and 'Symbol' is brought out again. A Symbol stands for an abstract concept, the universal; the Emblem expresses the universal as a truth.

The Emblem is man's servant in his quest for a metaphysical hold in the seventeenth century. It creates and confirms the universal by means of a truth statement. The 'Lebens- und Weltanschauung' of seventeenth century man, his metaphysics and his

ethics, his ontology and his epistemology, finds its expression and affirmation in the Emblem. The first step of the reflective mind, in philosophical discourse as well as in understanding the Emblem, is the observation of the physical world. In the Emblem two instances of reality are found to be analogous, i.e. one is the 'mirror-image' of the other, and by parabolic transition they are translated into a universe of meaning. Through the analogy the Subject is related to the Predicate, the Particular to the Universal.(pp. 42-68).

The place of the Emblem in the study of literary imagery is examined. Recent discussions of a phenomenology of literary imagery have shown that the concept of 'Symbol' has become increasingly vague, especially under the influence of post-classical literary interpretation. The distinction between the concepts of 'Symbol' and 'Emblem', which was mentioned in the previous chapter (pp. 42-68), is further developed. An examination of the 'symbolic' relation between object and idea reveals that it is contrary to the essential requirements of the Emblem, and that hence the Emblem cannot be

identified with the Symbol, nor can the former be seen as a sub-class of the latter. Further discussion leads to a distinction between the concepts of 'Symbol' and 'Sign'. It is found that the Sign does not stand for a universal, but that it expresses a fact or truth value. The essential distinction between Symbol and Sign lies in the fact that the Symbol represents a universal which it impresses on the reader, whereas the Sign presents a universal, and expresses it to the reader.

It follows that all emblematic imagery is considered to be a sub-class of the class of Signs. Finally some other classes of imagery belonging to the class of Signs are discussed: the Metaphor, the Simile and the Parable. An account of the Allegory is given in terms of a combination of Sign and Symbol (pp. 69 - 85).

An examination of four of Gryphius' tragedies opens with a discussion of typical emblematic key words. Some of these are Pictura 'clues', others Scriptura 'clues'. The key words indicating Pictura passages are related to sensory experiences, most of which refer especially

to visual observation, i.e. the verb 'sehen', or 'schauen'. Another Pictura key word often used is the demonstrative particle. Key words for the Scriptura are such as refer to mental processes, e.g. 'erkennen', 'lernen', 'glauben', etc. These words introduce the revelation of a universal truth, or the affirmation of a position already held by the speaker. In addition there are the 'Sentenzen', which take the place of the emblematic Inscriptio, or the motto. The introduction to the Scriptura often takes the form of an exclamation, or an imperative form of a verb; in the present work this is defined as exclamatio emblematica (pp. 86 - 102).

The emblematic form of the dramatic structure and the language of Gryphius' tragedies is discussed in the course of an examination of the act and the chorus as wider forms of a Pictura - Scriptura relation. As Scriptura the chorus translates the universe of physical observation - the Pictura of the act - into a universe of meaning expressed by the 'Sentenz' or motto (pp. 102-128).

This is followed by an examination of the monologue, the dialogue and smaller language units, single verses and parts of verses, which reveal the same tendency towards emblematic form, i.e. a sequence of Pictura and Scriptura, the latter interpreting the former and presenting it as a universe of meaning (pp. 128 - 163).

The examination of language forms is followed by a study of the development of the stage as an emblematic device. There is a direct line between the medieval 'poetic point' and the 'tableaux vivants', and the seventeenth century stage. The tableaux continue to influence the stage in the form of 'Vertooninghen' in seventeenth century drama. The touring companies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries contributed much to the spreading of this type of theatre throughout Europe. The tableaux, or 'Vertooninghen', are in themselves Emblems, as they provide Pictura and Scriptura in the form of a painted or live scene with an appropriate motto and an interpretative commentary by a speaker.

The influence of the Dutch 'rederijckers' and their theatre is also mentioned. Gryphius must have met both the touring companies and the 'rederijckers', the former probably as early as his youth in Silesia (most likely in Danzig), the latter during his sojourn in Holland. The original plays of the 'rederijckers' were plays with a meaning or a moral. As they were written in the form of an answer to a set question, they, in fact, are 'statements of truth'. This development leads to the seventeenth century stage which is not an ornamental surrounding of an action, but rather a device which makes the performance possible in that it becomes part of the 'statement' of the drama. The stage also reflects 'das große Welttheater' in that it contains a 'universal action', independent of the specific characters of the drama. (pp. 163 - 181).

An examination of the emblematic form of Gryphius' tragedies leads to a re-appraisal of his characters. The post-classical concept of the tragic hero is rejected and in its place a concept of tragedy is adopted which lies in the nature of the hero as a reflection of reality and an assertion of universal truths. This does not mean that there is

no development in Gryphius' characters. Character development is not found in the hero's rise from the depths of conflict to the heights of reconciliation with his fate. In Gryphius' characters we see a transformational development in which the hero goes through a sequence of conflicts, each one with an aspect of his fate. The transformation moves in one direction: from the observation of the world to the observation of truth. The emblematic structure of Gryphius' tragedies also shows the inadequacy of a 'typology theory' with respect to the characters. Each character is an individual Emblem in which human conditions are 'calculated' and which, in turn, acts as a *Pictura* in that the spectator is called to attach his own interpretative *Scriptura* to the 'mirror-image' of the world as depicted on the stage (pp. 181 - 224).

Finally a register of quotations from Gryphius' tragedies and a bibliography are attached (pp. 225 - 237).

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously written or published by any person, except when due reference is made in the text.