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The Seven Deadly Sins: Anthony Hecht's Emblem Poems[1]

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Abstract. Many poets writing after World War II felt a sense of diffidence towards the great ideals of history and religion. They offer a satiric interpretation of their time, and their work often perverts the typological reading of history illustrated in the Bible by opposing the promises of a second coming by Christ with the horrors of the war and the Holocaust, suggesting that the concept of "sacrifice" has no redemptive value. Anthony Hecht, an American post-war formalist, expresses this message through an ekphrastic medium, specifically emblems, inspired by mediaeval culture and Renaissance poetry. One of his early works, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, in collaboration with the engraver Leonard Baskin, presents a modern collection of emblem poems featuring the figure of Christ, which like the emblematic form can be seen as "word made flesh". Through their combinations of icons and words, the emblems become the perfect form to assess the dialectical opposition between God and man, body and soul, past and present.
Keywords: Emblems; Anthony Hecht; Deadly Sins; Gospels; Satire; Poetry.

[es] *The Seven Deadly Sins*: los poemas emblemáticos de Anthony Hecht

Resumen. Muchos poetas activos después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial sienten un cierto recelo hacia los grandes ideales de la historia y de la religión. Ellos ofrecen una interpretación satírica de su época, y sus obras, a menudo, pervierten la lectura tipológica de la historia presentada en la Biblia, oponiendo a la promesa de la vuelta de Cristo, los horrores de la guerra y del Holocausto, y privando así el concepto de "sacrificio" de cualquier valor redentor. Anthony Hecht, un formalista americano de la posguerra, expresa este concepto a través de un medio ekfrástico, el emblema, inspirado por la cultura medieval y la poesía del Renacimiento. Una de sus obras juveniles, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, en colaboración con el grabador Leonard Baskin, presenta una colección moderna de estampas acerca de la figura de Cristo quien, como los emblemas que unen texto e imagen, puede ser descrito como "palabra encarnada". Gracias a la combinación de imágenes y palabras, los emblemas se convierten en forma poética adecuada para evaluar la oposición dialéctica entre Dios y el hombre, cuerpo y alma, pasado y presente.
Palabras clave: Emblemas; Anthony Hecht; pecados capitales; Evangelio; sátira; poesía.

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1. Introduction

In his essay on "The Pathetic Fallacy", Anthony Hecht (1923-2004) notes that there was "an anagogic, emblematic view of nature in the Middle Ages until the 17th century, typically religious, wishing to see God in every aspect of creation, found in biblical texts and theological arguments, as well as in poems by Donne and Herbert"[3]. This emblematic view of nature refers to the cosmological perspective which characterised a time of change, ignited by the desire to make sense of the world through the association of objects, the comparison of the particular to the universal, and the accommodation of all aspects of knowledge into an organised whole, in which everything found correspondences through hierarchies, symbolical groupings and numerology.

[1] I would like to thank Professor Gregory Dowling (University of Venice Ca' Foscari) and the reviewers for the generous and illuminating observations they have contributed to this essay. Due to copyright regulations it has been impossible to include the pictures accompanying the poems in this article. The images can be found in Hecht's second book of poems, *The Hard Hours* (1967), and have been reprinted in the *Collected Earlier Poems* (1992, reprinted 1998).

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[3] Anthony Hecht, *Obbligati: Essays on Criticism* (New York: Atheneum, 1986), 11.

The epistemological mode of the Renaissance, as identified by Foucault[4], was partly inherited by Modernism in another time of historical upheaval –T.S. Eliot was much concerned, as *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1919) reminds us, with the idea of culture as a cohesive and ever adapting universe– and later followed by a poet who defines his work as "Governed by laws that stand for other laws, /Both of which aim, through kindred disciplines, /At the soul's knowledge and habiliment"[5]. Hecht began his poetic career "after World War II, when the New Criticism defined the expectations of readers of poetry, when Donne, the metaphysical, and Hopkins were at the apogee of their influence, and the preeminent modernist poets were Eliot, Yeats, Stevens and Auden, formalists all"[6]. At the basis of his views was the early modern-inspired conviction that poetry, just like art or architecture, or even music, aims, through form, not only at the completion of a whole, but also at clarification through resemblance – according to the same logic that makes Leonardo's Vitruvian man fit perfectly into a circle[7].

Hecht also had a life-long experience as a writer of emblems and similar exercises. His first attempt dates back to 1958, with the *Seven Deadly Sins*, and was immediately followed by *A Little Cemetery* (1960), an unpublished collection of epitaphs. *Struwwelpeter* and *A Bestiary*, two collections inspired by folk-tales, were published respectively by Gehenna and Kanthos press in 1958 and 1962. *Aesopic*, along the same lines, came out with Gehenna Press in 1967, accompanied by engravings by Thomas Bewick and later transposed into "Improvisations on Aesop ‘’ in *The Hard Hours*. The collaboration with Leonard Baskin, the engraver who illustrated some of these works, continued in 1995 with *The Presumptions of Death* – the most widely discussed among the emblem sequences – and *A Gehenna Florilegium*, in 1998. Baskin himself (1922-2000) was not only a famous sculptor, engraver and professor, but also the founder of the Gehenna Press. Other than collaborating with Hecht on these projects, Baskin took active interest in religious and literary topics. As a consequence, he worked with and befriended several literary figures in the United States and in Britain, such as James Baldwin and Ted Hughes. He illustrated several books, among which a 1953 edition of John Skelton's *The Tunning of Elynour Rummyng* (1550 ca.), and engraved the portraits of literary personalities such as William Blake and Joseph Conrad.

Overall, the poetic form born from these collaborations revisits icons and cultural remnants through wit, the ability which "confronts hurt and holds a balance that deserves to be called wisdom"[8]. This allows Hecht to achieve a synthesis, and to meditate on universal themes through objects and anecdotes. This exercise is the more fitting as it brings together many of the interests mentioned above: an indefatigable curiosity for tradition and popular culture, as found in Biblical parables, children's folktales and riddles[9], and a taste for light verse, wordplay and satire expressed through formal competence. It is thus a serious attempt at conjugating the physical and supernatural through extended conceits.

2. A brief history of emblems

Emblems were, traditionally, hybrid compositions relating an icon to a short, epigrammatic poem; Mario Praz defined them as "simple allegorical designs accompanied by an explanatory motto and destined to teach in an intuitive form a moral truth"[10]. They usually had a religious, military, amorous, moral or didactic aim, and were constituted of three parts: an *inscriptio*, meaning a short motto above the *pictura*; the *pictura*, or picture illustrating the story, and finally the *subscriptio*, a short poem which explained the scene reported in the image and associated it with a certain behaviour, clarifying its exemplary nature. This explanation resulted in a moral teaching, given in the motto –a laconic reminder of proper behaviour, like those of Aesopic fables and parables–. In short, they portrayed a scene (or thesis), its interpretation (its antithesis) and application of the moral (a synthesis of the two elements).

As Hecht mentioned, para-emblematic forms started to develop in the late Middle Ages, and emblems became a fully formed and increasingly popular genre in the 16th and 17th centuries, influencing the Renaissance and Baroque mentality. Mediaeval theologians had developed an allegorical reading of the Bible: as Peter Daly notes, St. Thomas Aquinas had distinguished, in the *Summa Theologica*, the *sensus historicus*, or a literal reading, from the *sensus spiritualis*, or the possibility of reading its passages in a symbolical way. This last mode of interpretation allowed in turn for three levels of meaning: the *sensus allegoricus* (a typological reading of the Old and New Testament), the *sensus tropologicus* (seeing biblical episodes as moral lessons), and the *sensus anagogicus* (reading passages as prophecies for the future). This mindset partly found practical application in the arts and thus became known to some extent among all social classes, encouraging instruction and resulting in a vast production of bestiaries, lapidaries, *Biblia Pauperum* and church decorations. Quoting Jöns, Daly[11] remarks on how exegetical interpretation extended from the scriptural world to everything in nature. This resulted, in time, in the all-encompassing mentality of the Renaissance. This age, an age of change from allegorical to scientific thinking, saw the universe as

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4 This thesis is exposed in Michel Foucalt, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York; London: Routledge, 2005).

5 Anthony Hecht, "Peripeteia", in *Collected Earlier Poems* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 140, from *Millions of Strange Shadows*.

6 Daniel Hoffman, "Our Common Lot", in *The Burdens of Formality: Essays on the Poetry of Anthony Hecht*, ed. Sidney Lea (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 42.

7 Anthony Hecht, *On the Laws of the Poetic Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 51.

8 Heaney's commentary on Bishop's wit in Anthony Hecht, "Seamus Heaney's Prose", in *Melodies Unheard: Essays on the Mysteries of Poetry* (Baltimore, London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 211.

9 This consideration appears in several essays, but is stated in Anthony Hecht, "The Riddles of Emily Dickinson", in *Obbligati: Essays on Criticism* (New York: Atheneum, 1986), 85-117.

10 Mario Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-century Imagery* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1975), 14-15.

11 Dietrich Jöns in Peter Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem: Structural Parallels between the Emblem and Literature in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Toronto; London: Toronto University Press, 1979), 41.

ordered and meaningful, a net of interrelated concepts, an ever-growing cohesive system, based on specularity.

The interpretative ambition of the Renaissance man, who tried to categorise objects to retrieve a sort of prelapsarian knowledge, brought about the view of the spiritual interpretation of objects as an act of salvation. The diffusion of emblems between the 15th and 17th century was caused by a renewed interest of the age in classical and ancient culture: emblems were mainly inspired by epigrams, short poems at first meant as lapidary inscriptions with a satirical or funereal aim, after the elegy. These were transmitted to the Early Modern period through the *Anthologia Palatina cum Planudeis*, and became a regular exercise for religious poets such as Donne and, most importantly Crashaw. Another source was the *Horapollo*, a collection which portrayed hieroglyphs as symbols standing for meanings rather than mere sounds, and establishing once again a correspondence between image and word. These elements feature in the first collection of emblems by Alciatus (1531), an Italian lawyer, which presented an array of mixed themes, such as popular anecdotes, mythological material and scientific observations from both the contemporary and classical world. Animals were a very popular subject, and later in time, especially in Holland, an erotic tradition flourished around the heart icon. Emblems quickly spread through Europe, with a volume by Guillaume La Perrière (1544) and the first English anthology, Geoffrey Whitney's *A Choice of Emblemes* (1601). Although they often relied on practical examples, they mostly did so to illustrate a moral teaching –something typical in Whitney himself, also found in Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (1593).

As the interest in this genre grew, emblems became more and more specific, and inclined towards didacticism. In 1611 the *Emblemata Saecularia* was published. Many of the emblems were based on Proverbs, and this initiated, especially around the northern area of Europe, a religious application of the form. Emblems were a general category outside of Italy, so that biblical pictures, illustrations of the lives of saints and of passion were included in it[12]. The apotheosis of this religious habit occurred in 1615 with Otto Vaenius' *Amoris Divini Emblemata*, which tweaked secular and mythological themes to fit them to religious purposes. Profane love becomes sacred in these volumes, and there is much allusion to real martyrdom, as well as to the idea of Christ as nourishment and lover of humanity. The embodiment of Christ in objects –trees, rocks with water gushing from the side, hills– was also promoted through the typological reading of the Old Testament. This had so much success that in 1624 Herman Hugo published another collection, called *Pia Desideria*, which contains elements from the Song of Solomon and the Psalms. In the words of Clements, "by the 17th century the clerical writers [were] crowding out the humanists"[13]. These emblems, as has been noted[14], encouraged the Ignatian technique of "the application of the senses" to religious themes, in order to visualise and thus meditate more mindfully on "Hell and the delights of a pious life".

The same debate between carnality and the spirit characterises the production and thought of the Metaphysical poets, made popular again after Grierson's edition[15] by Eliot and his contemporaries, and appreciated by Hecht from his youth. The interest in this duality was partly still indebted to the Renaissance view of man –as a microcosmic reflection of the universe, and as a creature whose soul, imprisoned in the body, was approached as concrete matter– and partly caused, in most cases, by their role in the church: Herbert and Donne, in particular, looked for objects and situations that would make spiritual truths more concrete for their religious communities, the way Christ had done in the parables. This was well suited to the new-found scientific outlook of the time, which encouraged observation, and was particularly relevant in a world still very much burdened by the practical side of life, through physical work and illnesses. Furthermore, this practice aligned with the tradition of "dialogues between soul and body", trying to achieve a synthesis between these two, started by St. Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians and famously found among Marvell's poems[16]. The same operation was attempted by the structural parts of the emblem, as the *pictura* and *subscriptio* were called, respectively, its body and soul[17].

Although the term "Metaphysical poets" has been accused of labelling as equal a heterogeneous group of poets[18], they all partake in the emblematic tradition to some degree. Crashaw began his poetic career by writing sacred epigrams, and later referred to actual emblems in his poetical production; Donne seems to have owned several emblem books, and along with Crashaw was instructed in the Jesuit emblem tradition[19]. Other than using word-emblems, meaning images and words commonly found as emblems, their entire poems could be structurally and thematically emblematic.

Their compositions anticipate Hecht's taste for contrariety, for riddles and wordplay, in the form of anagrams, figurative poems and other tricks. Biblical stories provide the basis for their poems, which most often deal with a moral quality –as in Donne's "The Indifferent" or Herbert's "Virtue" and "Sin"– present a significant object or animal, which becomes metaphorical –as in Donne's "The Flea", Herbert's "The Flower" or Crashaw's "The Widow's Mites"– or, more generally speaking, portray the physical incarnation of God, Christ, in the most varied situations, details and bizarre angles, in a mannerist fashion, and with a baroque mixture of sensuality and religion, especially coming from poets –like Donne and Crashaw– who converted to a different faith during their

12 Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-century Imagery*, 170.

13 Robert Clements, *Picta Poesis: Literary and Humanistic Theory in Renaissance Emblem Books* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1960), 100.

14 Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-century Imagery*, 170.

15 Herbert Grierson ed., *Metaphysical Lyrics & Poems of the 17th century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921).

16 Hecht mentions the antagonism between soul and body in relation to Paul (Galatians 5:17), in "The Sonnet: Ruminations on Form, Sex, and History" in *Melodies Unheard: Essays on the Mysteries of Poetry* (Baltimore, London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 62. Marvell's poem referred to is "A Dialogue between The Soul and The Body".

17 Josef Lederer, "John Donne and the Emblematic Practice", *The Review of English Studies* 22, no. 87 (1946): 182.

18 Anthony Hecht, "Letter to Ashley Brown, April 18, 1987", in *The Selected Letters of Anthony Hecht*, ed. Jonathan Post (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), 170-171.

19 Lederer, "John Donne and the Emblematic Practice", 184.

lifetime. As in the case of emblems, typology became a never-ending resource for correspondences, as it notably is in Herbert's "Bunch of Grapes" or Donne's "Sonnet XI: Spit in my face, you Jews". In all of these cases, the unvarying principle is that of association and correspondence between abstract and concrete reality, between soul and body. Praz thus defines emblems and conceits, the characteristic feature of this group, as "fruits of the same tree"[20]. Although both emblematists and conceitists drew from the same Renaissance iconology, the presence of exact emblems in their poetry testifies to a conscious influence of one over the other.

3. *The Seven Deadly Sins*

In the light of this long-standing tradition *The Seven Deadly Sins*[21], Hecht's first attempt in the field, follows the emblematic structure –and perhaps yearns for the fulfilment it promises– but challenges its aim. In a letter to Donald Hall dated around 1959, he writes that he has "just finished a collaboration with an artist here, a wood engraver named Leonard Baskin, on a small emblem book called *The Seven Deadly Sins*". The intent of the poems, however, goes decisively against the tradition: "the poems intend to justify the sins, not by making them attractive, but by showing that the alternatives are perhaps just as sinful or pointless; the rationale behind this being that the sins are not really deadly till they're really persuasive"[22]. Rather than letting his characters openly warn us against the sins, the author makes their actions ambiguous and their moral teaching indirect, forcing the reader to make an effort to try and distinguish between good and evil –an attempt that is bound to fail. In each emblematic poem, moreover, the moral message is conveyed by weighting the corruption brought about by vices against the corruption caused by the harsh struggles of reality as they are experienced in the human body, in a way that is very "persuasive" –to employ Hecht's dark irony– because physically manifest and painful.Through this balancing act, Hecht partly wishes to show how misery itself makes excess appealing, and most importantly to investigate, as it will become clear, the terms of God's relationship to man.

These emblems, later transposed into music by Robert Beaser, keep up with the Baroque tradition even in their superposition with different forms of art. The religious subject, in line with Hecht's interests and moral preoccupations, is also partly a medium to discuss more fundamental, universal themes. Although both he and Baskin were Jewish, they were fascinated with Christian culture and especially with Biblical images, "by nature near to the heart of the metaphor, implying or challenging relation, correspondence"[23].

As in the case of the Metaphysical poems, the dialogue between body and soul which is decisive to the subject and ingrained into the *inscriptio*/*pictura*/*subscriptio* structure finds its solution, ideally, in the motto and in the one who exemplifies it, the word of the spirit made flesh, the "emblem" Christ. He is an intermediate figure between God and man: as Hecht has noted in his essay on Emily Dickinson, "Christ himself has been seen as that human manifestation of the Godhead which allows all men to look upon that Truth which would otherwise be blinding"[24]. In this modern twist, however, the conventional dialogue between man and the son of God, founded on both guilt and love and projected towards the worship of the saviour of humanity, is questioned. The sinners become the focus of each poem, the true martyrs and sacrificial lambs, and the word of Christ, quoted from the Bible, becomes misleading and controversial when taken out of context. The spirit acquires corporeity in a satirical attempt to signal the paradox of a God who has given us a life-supporting body but requires us to ignore its compulsions and needs, by following the example of someone who is never, in practice, fully human. In other words, the question repeats itself throughout Hecht's career: "O that thou shouldst give dust a tongue/To cry to thee,/And then not hear it crying!"[25]. Overall, the approach to these emblems is perfectly described by the poet in a much later critical text, *The Hidden Law*, through a quote by Guy Davenport on Paul's Second Epistle to Timothy:

> The air around Jesus and Paul was full of devils. It is easy to see these for what they were: we call them viruses, bacteria, epilepsy, depression, phobias, obsessions, blindness, lameness, scleroses. And something subtler: meanness, cruelty, selfishness. We see Jesus healing both disease and the ungenerous heart, scarcely making a distinction between them, as if the wounded body and the wounded mind were the same kind of hurt crying out to heaven to be healed. Evil is in the mind, in the will. Evil is the power one person has over another, in governments, and especially in official views of virtue which conceal ill will, jealousy, and a great fear of the flesh and the world[26].

Although Hecht never disregards the spiritual, he wishes to bring attention to the extensive connection existing between physical suffering and the social issues which arise from it, as well as from moral or psychological despair. In this process, in particular, he points at the fact that all of these evils and the sins presented in his collection have a form of prevarication or violence as their primary cause or as their inevitable consequence, creating a vicious circle which is never acknowledged or redeemed by the divinity.

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20 Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-century Imagery*, 14.

21 Hecht, *Collected Earlier Poems*, 49-55, from *The Hard Hours*.

22 Hecht, "Letter to Donald Hall, ca.1959", in *The Selected Letters of Anthony Hecht*, ed. Jonathan Post (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), 114.

23 Hecht, *Obbligati*, 105.

24 Hecht, *Obbligati*, 110.

25 George Herbert, "Denial", in *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. Francis E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 79-80. Hecht quotes the lines in "Rites and Ceremonies", a poem which anticipates the emblem collection in the book: Hecht, *Collected Earlier Poems*, 38-47, from *The Hard Hours*.

26 The quote is employed to describe the association between body and psyche, also turned into the realm of religion in some of Auden's poems in *On This Island*, in Anthony Hecht, *The Hidden Law: The Poetry of W.H. Auden* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 51.

Remarkably, as the poet wrote to Eleanor Cook[27], he met Baskin at Smith in 1956, while the engraver's "interest in mortality was pronounced" as he was assisting his terminally ill wife. Even their next big collaboration years later, *The Presumptions of Death*, was somehow carried through under the shadow of propagating illness: Hecht explained in the letter that he had in mind, while writing the poems, the AIDS epidemic. He himself had been a witness to the suffering of the victims of World War II, in which he had fought and served as a translator to the captives of the Flossenburg concentration camp, who shared his same Jewish heritage. These poems, therefore, purposefully insist on the reality and unavoidable effects of corporeal suffering, as well as expanding the psychological dimension contributed by the Metaphysicals to the genre. The mediaeval tradition of the Deadly Sins in particular associated sins with specific wounds perpetuated against Christ during the passion, portraying immorality as a disease that deforms a person's interior the way physical disease deforms their exterior[28]. Donne and Herbert reflected these concerns in their poetry. As noted by Schoenfeldt "these writers confront the excruciating paradox of a religion of love whose central symbol is an instrument of torture and death"[29].

The typological tradition embraced by the poetic and emblematic early modern writers is furthermore challenged, as the proverbs and moral indications given against each fault offer Hecht a chance to discuss a topic very dear to him, that of the Law,' and to denounce certain disqualifying comparisons between Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Finally, from a structural point of view, mirroring the union of the human and religious which characterises the whole project, he encloses in concise, plain, and even colloquial lines –taken from the scriptures, and organised in epigrammatic couplets– a baroque infusion of sensuality and piety, which hints through symbolic images at the extratextual tradition described and therefore makes the texts rich in contradictions, both literal and moral. To combine plain style with baroque complexity, the poems present metaphors over conceits, or rather imply conceits by simply referencing them. This makes them "deliberately enigmatic […] dense, pointed, puzzling"[30], although the moral is often betrayed by the correspondence of repetitive sound and meaning. As Herbert wrote in "Jordan I", so Hecht can speak "plainly" without "loss of rhyme"[31].

A key concept for emblematic artists and poet-priests writing for their churchgoers, the Seven Deadly Sins are not featured under this name in the Bible –although they are deduced from it– but were assembled in books such as the *Biblia Pauperum*, and developed up to the Middle Ages in relation to *exempla* taken from the natural world and everyday life to teach morals to the poor in iconic, impactful ways, through a systematic approach[32]. The first attempts are Evagrius' (d. 399) and John Cassian's (d. 435), although the first widespread effort was Gregory the Great's account of the sins, drawing from the Book of Job, later on followed by Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*. As the tradition grew, the representation of the Deadly Sins became an important feature in the works of Dante, Chaucer, Gower, Langland and Spenser; even Auden, Hecht's mentor, dedicated himself to the topic[33].

4. Analysing the poems

4.1. Pride

> "For me Almight God Himself has died,"
> Said one who formerly rebuked his pride
> With, "Father, I am not worthy," and here denied
> The Mercy by which each of us is tried[34].

The sequence opens appropriately with "Pride", considered to be the source of all other sins and the worst one altogether, according to the common mediaeval tradition whose placement of the sins Hecht and Baskin replicate. In an interview with Philip Hoy, Hecht described it as "the most radical, pervasive, and nearly ineradicable of the sins […] capable of so many ingenious and unlikely disguises" as "Pride can disguise itself as humility"[35].

The poem follows the basic structure of an emblem, limiting its lines to two sets of iambic pentameter couplets in monorhyme AAAA, reminiscent of the peremptory cadence of Latin epigrams. The *pictura*, cast within a circular frame in the fashion of devices, is inspired by the iconology typically associated with pride, and brings together many emblematic symbols: a peacock with female features stands at the centre of the circle instead of Leonardo's Vitruvian subject, its skinny legs providing scarce support, and on top of it is a man, leaning on the opposite side, as to create a visual split in the top part of the representation. The two figures diverge both in colouring and placement, but converge in the axis of the bodies, which merge as one. The peacock is a traditional icon of pride (Fig. 1), as is femininity: many Mediae-

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27 Anthony Hecht, "Letter to Eleanor Cook on January 9, 1997", in *The Selected Letters of Anthony Hecht*, ed. Jonathan Post (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), 281.

28 Richard G. Newhauser, Richard and Susan J. Ridyard eds., *Sin in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: The Tradition of the Seven Deadly Sins* (York: York Medieval Press, 2012), 107-108.

29 Michael Schoenfeldt, "'The Spectacle of Too Much Weight': The Poetics of Sacrifice in Donne, Herbert and Milton", in *Seven-teenth-century British Poetry 1603-1660: A Norton Critical Edition*, eds. Gregory Chaplin and John Rumrich (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006).

30 Jonathan Post, *A Thickness of Particulars: The Poetry of Anthony Hecht* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 230-231.

31 George Herbert, "Jordan I", *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. Francis E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 56-57.

32 A history of the Deadly Sins is traced in Newhauser and Ridyard, *Sin in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*.

33 He contributed an essay to Angus Wilson ed., *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Akadine Press, 2002).

34 Leonard Baskin's engravings for each emblem can be consulted at the online collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. For the emblem of pride, see Leonard Baskin, "Pride", in Anthony Hecht, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Gehenna Press, 1958), accessed February 9, 2023, https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/seven-deadly-sins-book-pride-1501.

35 Anthony Hecht, *Anthony Hecht in Conversation with Philip Hoy*, interview by Philip Hoy (London: Between the Lines, 1999), 66.

val and Renaissance emblems feature in fact a lady on top of an animal, usually a lion[36], in the act of elevating herself through what is merely a beastly, inconsistent self-love. The starkness of the engraving, with its lack of details, almost divests the peacock of its majestic plumage to reveal a chicken body underneath, with a markedly different connotation.

Figure 1. Illustration of Amor and Anima driving away a peacock, a symbol of pride, with the motto *Superbiam odit*. Originally by Otto Vaenius, *L'ame amante de son Dieu, representée dans les emblémes de Hermannus Hugo sur ses pieux desirs: & dans ceux d'Othon Vaenius sur l'amour divin.* Cologne: J. De la Pierre, 1717, LIII, 384. Source: Archive.org. Accessed February 17, 2022. https://archive.org/details/lameamantedesond00hugo/page/384/mode/2up?q=superbiam

In spite of the independent work of artist and poet, suggested by Avery[37], the quatrain replicates, following the tradition of the emblem, the false duality represented in the *pictura*, and the language becomes iconic. The poem in fact is built as a brief anecdote which teaches an ambiguous moral lesson through demonstration, the way a parable works. Such a demonstration is achieved by the opposition of two modes of behaviour exemplified in corresponding statements. The two statements occupy the first and third line, and are placed in reverse chronological order.

The first, counter-intuitively, represents the negative example: "For me Almighty God Himself has died". The object, in central position, is exhibited through excessive use of capital letters and reiteration. This triggers a series of structural antitheses: the main verb, "said", half-rhyming internally with all the endings, is placed before the subject, "one", mimicking the focus-oriented tone of an Aesopic fable[38]. The monosyllabic subject contrasts with the line-long object to which it is related, and is put into focus through its ambivalent actions, introduced in the second line through the relative pronoun "who". The two-time adverbs, "formerly" and "here", follow the same chronological order and are each accompanied by a verb, "rebuked" and "denied" annulling the previous statement; in turn, these verbs inform objects with an inherently, as well as contextually opposed meaning: mercy and pride.

This intricate architecture betrays a fundamental hypocrisy in the speaker, who is compelled throughout the poem by the same feeling of pride, so that such complex lines are made equal, on first impact, by the repetitive cadence of the rhyme. At the same time, the use of verbs with a negative function ("died", "rebuked", "denied") allows for the sin never to be admitted directly. Throughout the chiastic structure a "Father" figure has become "God Almighty"; as pride is the original sin, it contains all others, and is also extended from "one" to "each of us" in the same way, as Post notes[39], that mankind has reversely become "[for] me".

The tripartite division common to emblems is partly changed in this collection: the moral motto is in fact substituted by the title, the sin discussed, and the *inscriptio* is usually merged with the *subscriptio* and located, as in the case of the sonnet, in the last couplet or sentence. This adds to the impression that there is no clear moral to be found in the text, where evident images betray blurred interpretations. In this case, the notion that the sin "denied/The Mercy by which each of us is tried" brings about a paradoxical message: pride seems to annul a benefit which in itself measures and judges the insufficiency of human behaviour, and is, as perhaps is suggested in another emblem, "Wrath", as worthless and inconsistent.

The indecisive nature of the *inscriptio* is mirrored in the contradictory sources which inspire the two sentences. The second one may have two possible sources, both from the Gospels: the parable of the centurion in Matthew 8:5-13 (also in Luke 7:1-10) and the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32.

[36] Debra Hassig ed., *The Mark of The Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life and Literature* (New York, London: Garland Publishing, 2000), 57-59.

[37] Paul Avery, "Imagery and Violence in The Poetry of Anthony Hecht" (RMA Thesis Comparative Literary Studies, Utrecht University, 2012), 112-113.

[38] ("It was a tortoise aspiring to fly that murdered Aeschylus"). Anthony Hecht, "Improvisations on Aesop", *Collected Earlier Poems*, 61, from *The Hard Hours*.

[39] Post, *A Thickness of Particulars*, 231.

The first describes a centurion sending some friends to Jesus to ask him to save his servant:

> And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.

The centurion stands as a type for humbleness: he is a pagan, but still accepts his subordination to the power of Jesus and selflessly invokes him to save a mere servant, while being in a position of great prestige. His prayer reveals a complete trust in the performative power of a simple word by Christ, as well as a lack of self-aggrandisement. In this view, the soldier moves from self-concerned pride to generosity. His example is so iconic that it has been inserted into Catholic mass to describe the appropriate attitude to be observed in the act of communion. The centurion's following explanations are also crucial (9-10): "For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth *it*". While this man makes a comparison between Christ and himself in regard to their position of authority only to extend Christ's authority above all, the speaker of the first phrase does the opposite, comparing Christ to himself on the ground of their mutual mortality and implying his own predominance in the hierarchical order.

A similar exchange happens between the son and the father in the second parable. This one tells of a young man who wastes all of his father's money around the world, and, finding himself poor, decides to seek his help once again. The story betrays a premeditated intention of the son, and hints at the possible exploitation of the father, showing how the conception of one's worthiness, although apparently innocent, could be used cunningly to one's advantage.

Both excerpts, interestingly, deal with the theme of slavery; this datum is particularly significant when associated with a potential source for the first statement. If we take the centurion's prayer as the source for the claim pronounced "formerly", it is possible to assume that the speaker of the second may be an altogether different character. A potential heir of the centurion may be another converted Pharisee, St. Paul, in a sort of reinvented typological convention between his words and the New Testament – Paul himself introduced this habit.

Paul has always been associated with pride and arrogance in Hecht's career; most importantly, he dedicated an essay to the Epistle to the Galatians in *Melodies Unheard*. In the essay, he discusses the dangers of Paul's self-assuredness as a receiver of the law of God, behaviour which brings him to justify a personal vision, as well as to condemn divergent views, deliberating on the extent to which the Mosaic Law should be followed by Gentiles.

The main point of the essay is that Paul reads Christ's sacrifice as an act of liberation from the slavery of the Law. Hecht quotes some telling passages: Christ came "to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons […] wherefore thou art no more a servant but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (4:5-7). This recalls almost literally the story of the prodigal son, and suggests a sort of cunning behaviour behind his pious mask: not following the Law is turned into an occasion for arrogance. As a matter of fact, in the very same letter (2:20), he echoes the words found in "Pride": "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me". The passage from the role of servant to the role of son permitted by mercy can thus be seen as supposed advancement towards godhead, making man bolder. At the same time, mercy –as will soon become clear– is one side of Christ only, the other being justice: the Son can induce pride in man through his act of sacrifice for mankind, but this very sacrificial act can become a meter of judgement through which men will be "tried". By making Christ a servant on account of his sacrifice, Paul, like the protagonist of the poem and the man in the pictura –almost falling as his effective weight cannot be borne by the weak creature, which also happens to be a symbol for Christ[40]– stands on a precarious pedestal which has been offered to him only to test his worth. As he denies his father he breaks the first of the commandments, but also denies his own God-given nature and his own importance, revealing his sin. This way, the crisis of the Fall is never recovered and healed into circularity, but tends to worsen instead.

4.2. Envy

> When, to a popular tune, God's Mercy and Justice
> Coagulate here again,
> Establishing in tissue the True Republic
> Of good looks to all men
> And victuals and wit and the holy sloth of the lily,
> Thou shalt not toil nor spin[41].

The next poem in the sequence explores the sin of envy. The *pictura* that accompanies the text portrays a ram, or a horned creature with evident male connotations, as opposed to the animal in "Pride". The ram or goat, with exaggerated and sexualised features, was traditionally employed to represent the sin of lust, and could be associated with the devil. On the other hand, Christianity describes the Son of God as "the sacrificial lamb", an animal which is at times represented in the New Testament, as in Apocalypse 5:5-7, or typologically prefigured in the Old Testament as a ram, as in the case of Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22). In the Hebrew tradition, a goat representing the sins of the community would be thrown from a steep peak, while another would be slaughtered to complete the sacrifice

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[40] Alison Syme, "Taboos and the Holy in Bodley 764", in *The Mark of The Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life and Literature*, ed. Debra Hassig (New York, London: Garland Publishing, 2000), 169.

[41] For the emblem of envy, see Leonard Baskin, "Envy", in Anthony Hecht, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Gehenna Press, 1958), accessed February 9, 2023, https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/seven-deadly-sins-book-envy-1498.

and drive away evils (something Hecht portrays in his poem "Pig"[42]); in the Middle Ages, the antisemitic habit of comparing Jews with goats developed[43], reinforcing their connotation as carriers of evil, devils, and scapegoats. Overall, the antithetical notions of violence and sacrificial piousness coexist in the figure of the male goat, and the symbolism inherent in the animal corresponds to the references made by the poet in the *subscriptio* about the duality of the envious man, the Day of Judgment, and the Christian and Hebrew scriptures. In relation to this last point, it is also possible to recognise another creature in the *pictura*: according to Syme, horns are related in Mediaeval bestiaries to the concept of Law and, in particular, "The ibex […] represent those learned men who understand the harmony of the Old and New Testaments"[44]. Aside from the significant symbolism, the image portrays a man whose internal tensions and dissatisfaction seem to shape his physical features: the black knot of lines on his chest spreads outwards forcing his features into stiffness, and growing into excrescences which manifest, as in the case of the horns, a desire for revenge or prevarication which is hardly restrained.

The habit of comparison which characterises envy is immediately made visible in the rhyme scheme, a sestet formally alternating pentameter and trimeter, which creates an evident disparity between one line and the other. Even in the music sheet Hecht highlights the presence of "modal note groups", opposing "soft but appropriately sinister overtones" and "uneven groups of notes which […] enhance the sardonic wit of the text delivered with deceptive sweetness in its Brechtian economy" against "the strictly rhythmic passage beginning 'Establishing in Tissue'"[45].

At the same time, no line forms a complete sentence, forcing the reader to fall into an obsessive loop of anticipation with an unexpected ending, which works as a moral motto in more than one way. The whole poem is constituted of a single clause, with five verbs: two coordinates ("coagulate", "establishing") describing a subordinate phrase with temporal value ("when") and the main verb ("shalt") in the final line, supporting the iconic biblical infinitives "toil" and "spin". In between actions, described in lines 2, 3 and 6, there are no pauses, but rather several asides placed strategically to specify the context and the details surrounding said actions, while lengthening the conclusion of the thought. This same practice recalls the typical behaviour triggered by envy of dwelling on still unattained particulars, and of giving life to perspective situations through an overreaching and exaggerated imagination, also remarked upon in emblems (Fig. 2).

One of the most interesting aspects of this poem, as pertaining to the tradition of the Deadly Sins, is the idea of a material constitution of abstract values, such as "God's Mercy and Justice". This is, once again, reminiscent of Christ, and coming full circle, from his sacrifice in "Pride", to his return on the Day of Judgment, where mercy also meets deliberation. The "popular tune" to which the poet refers may be the one found in "Wrath", as all the poems are interrelated.

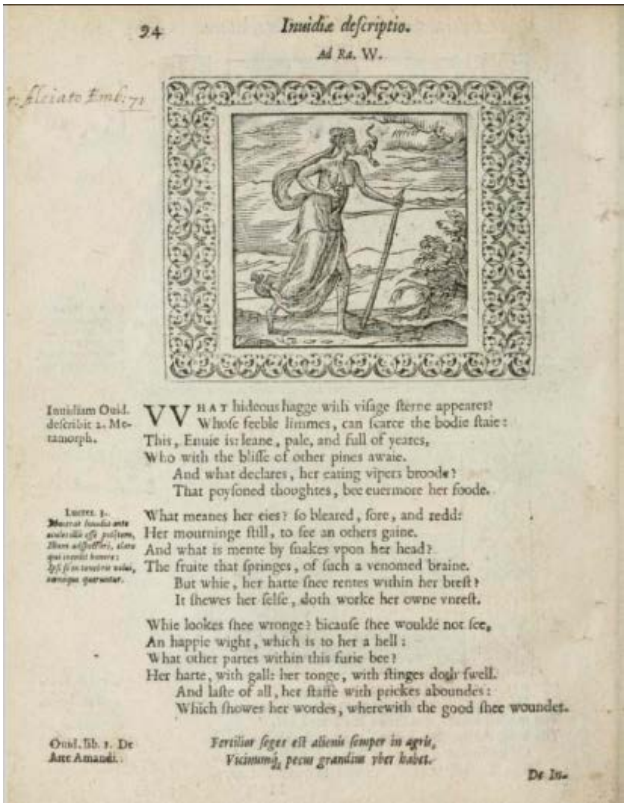

Figure 2. "Invidiae descriptio", in Whitney, Geoffrey. *A Choice of Emblemes, and other devises : For the moste parte gathered out of sundrie writers, Englished and Moralized. And divers newly devised.* Leyden: Christopher Plantyn, 1586, 94. Source: Archive.org. Accessed February 17, 2022. https://archive.org/details/choiceofemblemes00whit/page/94/mode/2up[46]

Coagulation is the process in which blood cells converge to heal a wound, and perhaps, metaphorically, to repair an injustice or loss. In this sense, justice becomes not only something that is enforced from above, but something that is longed for and thoroughly absent in the world after the Fall and felt, following the tendency of the whole sequence, as a concrete privation in the very flesh of human beings, exposed to bite of the social issues previously mentioned. Hecht may have been recalling

42 Anthony Hecht, "Pig," in *Collected Earlier Poems* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 13, from *The Hard Hours.*

43 Frank Felsenstein, "Jews and Devils: Stereotypes of Late Medieval and Renaissance England", *Literature and Theology* 4, no. 1 (1990).

44 Syme, "Taboos and the Holy", 170.

45 Anthony Hecht and Robert Beaser, "The Seven Deadly Sins", in *New Vocal Repertory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1979).

46 What hideous hagge with village sterne appeares?/Whose feeble limes, can scarce the bodie staie:/This, Envie is: leane, pale, and full of years,/Who with the blisse of other pines awaie./And what declares, her eating vipers broode?/That poisoned thoughts, bee evermore her foode./What makes her eyes so bleared, sore ad red:/Her mourning still, to see an others gaine./And what is mente by snakes upon her head?/The fruite that springes, of such a venomed braine./But whie, her harte shee rentes within her brest?/It shewes her selfe, doth worke her owne unrest./Whie lookes shee wronge? because shee woulde not see,/An happie wight, which is to her a hell:/What other partes within this furie bee?/Her harte, with gall: her tonge, with stinges doth swell./And laste of all, her staffe with prickes aboundes:/Whill shows her words, wherewith the good shee woundes.

Donne's "Anniversary"[47], or perhaps Bishop's "The Man-moth", a poem he analysed in later years[48], in which he identifies "a disease he has inherited the susceptibility to" with Original Sin. The idea of coagulation might also hint, in a rather unappealing way, at the act of reincarnation of Christ within our bodies through the ceremony of the Eucharist – something that will return in "Lust"[49].

The physical process is carried on as mercy and justice are seen as "establishing in tissue the True Republic": the return of Christ on Earth will extend his qualities to the whole of humanity, bringing equality and restoring it to its Edenic state, after the "toil and spin" associated with postlapsarian reality. Nonetheless, the term "tissue" seems to suggest the belief that Christ's coming will bring benefits that are once again felt in the flesh and that seem foreign to an edenic world. The word "Republic", in particular, gains a significantly ironic connotation. The concept is defined by Augustine in *The City of God*:

> But because this man listens and that man scoffs, and most are enamored of the blandishments of vice rather than the wholesome severity of virtue, the people of Christ, whatever be their condition […] are enjoined to endure this earthly republic, wicked and dissolute as it is, that so they may by this endurance win for themselves an eminent place in that most holy and august assembly of angels and republic of heaven, in which the will of God is the law[50].

While Augustine's use of the word suggests an equality which transcends one's earthly condition by virtue of a common spiritual faith, the speaker here transposes the metaphorical concept of incarnation "in tissue" to a decisively material perspective, and associates equality first and foremost with "good looks to all men" –the only rhyming sentence in the poem– followed by "victuals and wit". The "holy sloth of the lily"[51] refers to Matthew 6:25-34 and Luke 12:22-32. The moral lesson behind this example is that man should entrust God with his sustenance, and not worry about his material condition, a message which completely clashes with the lust after food and vanity declared by the protagonist. Although here the "holy sloth of the lily" stands as a contracted emblematic image for peace of mind, it is typical of an envious person to wish for other people's material goods and at the same time long for an ending to this very self-induced longing. In fact, envy is never explicitly mentioned in the poem, but only emphasised by the repetitive style of the syntax and by the rhyme between "man", "again" and "spin", following the rhyme scheme ABCBDB.

The image of corporal (rather than spiritual) wholeness brought about by the Day of Judgement is also typical of the early modern imagination. It is present in Herbert's "Doomsday"[52], where the souls "Summon all the dust to rise,/Till it stirre, and rubbe the eyes;/While this member jogs the other". This process of reincarnation, however, is not as glorious as that of the blameless Christ, and instead of reaching perfect unity, "Man is out of order hurl'd,/Parcell'd out to all the world".

The concepts of justice and mercy cannot truly be synthesised in the eyes of the envious man, who then denies Christ's spiritual side. While mercy is the foundation of faith, the envious man mainly cares for a selfish kind of justice, and wishes for a reintegration of the two which he himself fails to achieve, by hating those who have "wronged" him with their better state.

Justice is also one of the main themes of the *Merchant of Venice*, and along with mercy it is the protagonist of Portia's speech during Shylock's trial, in act IV scene I. She asks him to be merciful, since it is mercy rather than justice which will bring salvation upon humanity, and to renounce his pound of flesh – perhaps this is where the idea of "coagulation" comes from. As Hecht explains in his essay on the play, Shylock embodies "thrift, careful and prudential", opposed to the prodigality of Bassanio, willing to give everything away, and to Antonio's selfless offer of his own body in sacrifice. Turning his own strategy against him, Portia disguised as Balthazar reminds Shylock that "*the law, the letter of the law, literally construed, without the aid of mercy or the agency of the New Dispensation, is both nonsense and inoperable*. And this is why the Jew 'must' be merciful"[53]. By referring to Shylock's trial, whose request for a pound of flesh seems to hide an act of revenge more than anything else, Hecht may wish to point to the fact that envy, a feeling born from a sense of inequality between two contenders, can at times escalate and trigger a desire for vengeance. The temptation to retribute the offender with the same pain they have inflicted in the first place comes as the result of extreme prevarication, and it can stem in response to a meaningless and cruel form of rejection or subordination, such as the hateful treatment of the Jews in Venice by some of the characters in the play.

While the play poses the "Book of Love" above the "Book of the Law", Hecht's vision of the end of time hints at their reunification, and the envious mind parallels these opposite concepts, while completely disregarding the first. The problem of mercy and justice is furthermore explored in the speaker's attitude towards the physical sufferings of Christ. The envious man is willing to take reincarnation not as a proof of Christ's holiness but as an event that will bring about his own satisfaction. He dwells on the physical act of the sacrifice ("coagulate again") with complete disregard for the

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47 John Donne, "Anniversary", in *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, ed. Robin Robbins (Edinburgh: Longman Annotated English Poets, 2010), 126-129.

48 Elizabeth Bishop, "The Man-moth", in Athony Hecht, *Melodies Unheard: Essays on the Mysteries of Poetry* (Baltimore, London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 159-171.

49 A similar image in relation to blood returns in another poem, "The Song of The Flea" where blood sucking characterises "those that flatter" and those "that would redress the matter/By publishing their woes", meaning those who pity themselves and flatter others, the envious who "live upon your blood". Hecht, "The Song of The Flea", in *Collected Earlier Poems*, 58.

50 Augustine. *The City of God*, ed. Marc Dods (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1871), I: 72.

51 It is interesting to note that this biblical expression returns in Hecht's poem "Behold the Lilies of the Field", from *The Hard Hours*, see Hecht, *Collected Earlier Poems*, 10-12, which he remarkably dedicated to Baskin himself, as well as that the idea of the lilies related to indolence will come back in the composition of the poems for the *Gehenna florilegium*, as explained in a letter to Baskin on October 24, 1997 in Hecht, *The Selected Letters*, 288-289.

52 George Herbert, "Doomsday", *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. Francis E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 186-187.

53 Anthony Hecht, "*The Merchant of Venice*: A Venture in Hermeneutics", in *Obbligati: Essays on Criticism* (New York: Atheneum, 1986), 187.

sufferings of the son of God. A similar disparity between man's egotism and Christ's generosity is explored in Herbert's "The Sacrifice".

Having set up a wishful picture of fulfilment, and tending towards a –even if disillusioned– satisfaction to save us from envy, the result, expressed in a concise sentence, leaves us surprised. In fact, instead of finding a phrase descriptive of the delights of heaven, or filled with promised objects, we are welcomed by a definitive exhortation, becoming a prohibition through the double negation: "thou shalt not toil nor spin". The line, which originally describes the "lilies of the field" of the biblical metaphor mentioned above ("they toil not, neither do they spin") is transformed to mimic the formulation of a commandment ("Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them"[54]). This sentence could be read as a promise or hopeful expectation regarding life after bodily death, but it could also be meant as a prohibition, a law of the "Republic" to come, and something that worries the protagonist: the habit of envy is a compulsion, extenuating but endlessly necessary and hard to stop; moreover, the final union and equalisation of all mankind in God could be read (as by Shylock, forced to become a Christian) as an unwelcome imposition.

Whether the selfish desire and envious approach of the protagonist is born from vice or from the deprivations he has suffered in life, he cannot prescind from his material preoccupations, and remains caught in them even as he tries to picture the end of his earthly pains.

4.3. Wrath

> I saw in stalls of pearl the heavenly hosts,
> Gentle as down, and without private parts.
> "Dies Irae," they sang, and I could smell
> The dead-white phosphorous of sacred hearts[55].

The same apocalyptic scenario, with a stronger satirical tone, is found in the following poem, "Wrath". The *pictura* paired with the text once again seems to draw inspiration from several sources: Medusa, a classical symbol of wrath, may be hinted at by the snake coming out from the woman's hair, or she may be a representation of Lady Macbeth, overcome by rage, in the act of summoning the demons to her breast. At the same time, the contrasting white of the body with the black background goes well with Hecht's presentation of the angels, and the serpent sliding between mouth and chest is echoed in their singing and in the exhalations of their hearts. This intermixing of classical and religious themes is commonly found in the emblematic tradition. Most remarkably, the picture by Baskin closely resembles the representation of Envy painted by Giotto in the Arena Chapel in Padova, showing a woman with a serpent coming out of her mouth. The association between the *pictura* and this painting reinforces even further the paradoxical nature of the angel represented: the image warns us before the text that the inaudible chant which accompanies the whole poem will prove to be poisonous.

The poem is composed of four lines, and its brevity fits well the crudity of the vision, leaving no space for consolation, as well as the inherent opposition between expectation and reality. Hecht defined this passage as "a very fast movement […] marked 'con fuoco', rich in "heavily accented syncopations"[56]. The rhyme scheme is ABCB; lines 1 and 3 present the two protagonists, witness ("I saw") and perpetrator ("they sang") in chiastic opposition, while lines 2 and 4 comment on the switch in perspective of the colour –and the concept– dominating the visual scene: pure white.

The vision opens with a sensorial verb ("I saw") followed by the setting of the scene and, finally, the subject of the vision. The "stalls of pearl" recall the description of Jerusalem, the wife of Christ, coming down from the sky on the Day of Judgment in the Book of Revelation (21:21): "The twelve gates *were* twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city *was* pure gold, like transparent glass."

The atmosphere of the scene is deceptive in the beginning: pearls, rare and precious formations with an innate "light from within", seem the perfect object to describe the pure and graceful nature of angels, but are here related to "stalls", which may hint at both a homely and military context. The expression "heavenly hosts" immediately turns the angels into fighters united in an army, the one that fought the War in Heaven. This characterization as opponents of the rebel angels only seems to add to their innocence an attribute of faithfulness and solemnity. At the same time, the distance between sublunary and spiritual seems to shorten telescopically in this last day, where the reign of God is pictured in material terms (not very differently from Milton's Pandemonium, and equally raised from music) and even the angels engage in such contentions.

The next line introduces a sort of angelic anatomy: the "down" which remarks their gentleness reminds the reader of their feathers, and therefore becomes incarnate in their persona; it furthermore ties in with the quality of pearliness, forming a sort of objective correlative. The lack of sexuality, added to the description at last, further strengthens the atmosphere of candour and levity which surrounds these figures. The aforementioned materiality of the context counteracts their own lack of humanity, which up to this point only contributes to make them divine and worthier than man.

It is with the third line, swerving away from the rhyming pattern of the first, that the whole scene is overturned. The positional switch of verb and subject at the beginning of the line surprises us with the real purpose of the vision: "Dies Irae", the Day of Wrath. Human senses, the recipients and perpetrators of sin, define here the roles of the two parties: while the spectator witnesses the scene with his eyes, passively, the angels sing the Day of Judgment into reality. The song mentioned recalls the mediaeval tradition of religious litanies which certainly inspired the imagination behind emblems. *Dies Irae* was written in the 13th century by a Franciscan priest, Thomas of Celano, and is usually sung as the requiem during funereal

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54 Exodus 20:5.

55 For the emblem of wrath, see Leonard Baskin, "Wrath", in Anthony Hecht, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Gehenna Press, 1958), accessed February 9, 2023, https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/seven-deadly-sins-book-wrath-1503.

56 Hecht and Beaser, "The Seven Deadly Sins".

mass[57]. It announces God's punitive act on the Last Day, describing the destruction that his coming will cause; thus, through an extratextual reference, Hecht brings into his concise epigram the whole context which sets the scene at large, and which echoes the title of the piece. The situation is also made the more chilling by the association of angels' chants –the sweetest melody, the force which moves the nine spheres of the universe– with an occasion for revenge. Hecht uses harsh sounds to reinforce even more this puzzling divergence, and notes: "Apart from a brief moment of respite at the start of the 'Dies Irae' section, the ferocity of the attack has to be maintained right up to the shouted ending"; he also insists on "percussive consonants". This makes the song a mixture of snake-like hissing and implosions of controlled anger: more than the others, this emblem follows the "mixture of crude realism and ecstatic mysticism" of Jesuit emblems[58].

As soon as this is realised, the enchanting parade becomes an assembly in the tribunal where our sins will not simply be judged, but punished. The positive qualities of the angels are now reversed, and seen under a different light: their whiteness no longer suggests purity, but blankness, indifference; the lack of private parts, opposed to the prosperous figure in the plate for "Lust", does not convey innocence or a superior, non-beastly nature – rather, a lack of humanity and compassion. These are not creatures belonging to the nature of both man and God, as the merciful figure of Christ would be: they are not mediators, but executors. As Brodsky later observed: "The writer is bound to find flaws […] in angels, if only because angels are inferior to humans since they are not created in God's own image"[59].

The idea that angels do not feel emotions is here taken to its absolute extent, inferring that being unable to feel pain or amazement also results in the complete absence of empathy. The revelation, both personal and biblical, finds its culmination in the last line, breaking the suspense created by the enjambment. The colour of down and pearl is no longer reminiscent of light, but is rather a "dead-white", the colour of the phosphorus which paints their "sacred hearts", an oxymoron in itself. Even in the Bible the apparition of angels is usually a cause of distress to the witness, and their speeches often open with the phrase: "do not be afraid"[60]. They are, even according to the Holy Book, imperfect. This is testified, among several instances, in Job 15:15 ("the heavens are not guiltless in his sight") and Isaiah 24:15. More significantly, the association between wrath and religious figures became prominent in the Middle Ages, when texts like *Piers Plowman* (B version, passus 5: "The Seven Deadly Sins") described this vice as one common among clergymen. Hecht himself often discussed the dangerous sectarian and intolerant tendencies of the church, as in his essay on the Epistle to the Galatians.

This is significant on several levels: their hearts are not made of flesh and blood but of a rare substance, a volatile one; this would be coherent with the ethereal nature of their bodies, but also betrays the notion that such hearts are either inconstant or made of stone. Phosphorus, furthermore, represents a meaningful choice. Its shade reminds one of the yellow-green transparency of ghosts, and is the colour of sickness and spookiness, signalling the incorporeal. The white variety, especially, was discovered in alchemic experimentations in the 1600s by Brandt, in an attempt to find the philosopher's stone. It is a pyrophoric substance[61], which self-ignites when in contact with oxygen, causing fire and smoke, and is highly toxic. At the time it was the sly ingredient of choice for murderers, and during World War One and Two, as well as in Vietnam, it became frequently employed to make ammunitions, commonly known as "Willie Peter"[62]. An echo of similar effects, which Hecht possibly experienced first hand, can even be found in an uncollected sonnet written from the poet's youth[63], "A Friend Killed in the War":

> In the clean brightness of magnesium
> Flares, there were seven angels by a tree.
> Their hair flashed diamonds, and they made him doubt
> They were not really from Elysium.
> And his flesh opened like a peony,
> Red at the heart, white petals furling out

According to John Emsley[64], white phosphorus was banned after World War One because "shells would create showers of burning phosphorus fragments that rained down, causing excruciating burns", a different version of the beneficent act of God, who "sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust"[65]. Interestingly, "Phosphorus" is the Greek name for "Lucifer", which means "bringer of light". Skagen explains that "from the beginning there was a great fascination with the substance among alchemists and chemists, since its luminescence could also be identified with the "vital flame" or associated with "the universal light – drawn forth from chaos, ad on the first day of creation"[66]. This epithet reminds one of "the star of the morning", the fallen Satan, but is equally used to praise Christ:

> Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes[67].

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57 It is interesting to note that Crashaw translated the song and gave a version of it in his poems. See Richard Crashaw, *The Complete Works of Richard Crashaw*, ed. Alexander Balloch Grosart (London: Robson and Sons, 1872), I: 166-169.

58 Lederer,"John Donne and the Emblematic Practice", 185-186.

59 Joseph Brodsky, "Anthony Hecht and the Art of Poetry", in *The Burdens of Formality: Essays on the Poetry of Anthony Hecht*, ed. Sidney Lea (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 50.

60 Luke 2:10 is an example.

61 *Enciclopedia Treccani*, s.v.: "Fòsforo", accessed Dec. 21, 2022, http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/fosforo/.

62 Ian Sample, "What is White Phosphorus?", *The Guardian*, Nov. 19, 2005, https://www.theguardian.com/science/2005/nov/19/thisweekssciencequestions.uknews.

63 Post, *A Thickness of Particulars*, 19. The poem has been published in *Poetry* 198, no. 5 (2011): 447-448.

64 In Sample, "What is White Phosphorus?".

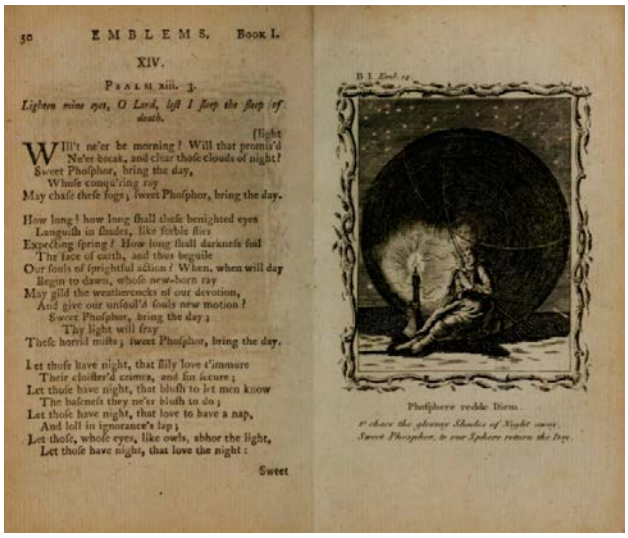
65 Matthew 5:45, KJV.

66 Margaret Hagen y Margery Skagen, *Literature and Chemistry: Elective Affinities* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2014), 280.

67 From 1 John 2:8-11, suggested by Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-century Imagery*, 217.

Most importantly, phosphorus embodies all the contradictions which Hecht wishes to portray: it is "cold fire", alight in the dark, deceptively dangerous; it is ethereal and pale, yet highly explosive and bad smelling. It can offer light or burn down, and this compresence reflects Lewis' definition of God as "love which, by its very nature, includes wrath also"[68], a disparity which Hecht tries to portray in these emblems.

The Renaissance and Mediaeval references in the poem thus help to revive a past perspective: that of a time in which stones were thought to have supernatural powers and angels were not always seen as the utterly benevolent guardians of man. From the Byzantine age[69] to the engravings by Michael Burgher on Milton's 1688 edition of *Paradise Lost*, in fact, a long pictorial tradition has been established of portraying angels in military attire, often in the guise of Roman soldiers. Angelic physiology was discussed in many treatises, and the body was often associated with natural elements and humours; a choleric character, specifically, corresponded to fire. Alchemy was at its peak at this time in history, and phosphorus even features in some emblems by Quarles, the British emblematist, specifically in relation to Christ (Fig. 3).


50 EMBLEMS. Book I.

XIV.

Psalm xiii. 3.

Lighten mine eyes, O Lord, lest I sleep the sleep of death.

Will't ne'er be morning? Will that promis'd light
Ne'er break, and clear those clouds of night?
Sweet Phosphor, bring the day,
Whose conqu'ring ray
May chase these fogs; sweet Phosphor, bring the day.

How long! how long shall these benighted eyes
Languish in shades, like feeble flies
Expecting spring? How long shall darkness foil
The face of earth, and thus beguile
Our fools of sprightful action? When, when will day
Begin to dawn, whose new-born ray
May gild the weathercocks of our devotion,
And give our unsoul'd souls new motion?
Sweet Phosphor, bring the day;
Thy light will fray
These horrid mists; sweet Phosphor, bring the day.

Let those have night, that slily love t'immure
Their cloister'd crimes, and sin secure;
Let those have night, that blush to let men know
The baseness they ne'er blush to do;
Let those have night, that love to have a nap,
And loll in ignorance's lap;
Let those, whose eyes, like owls, abhor the light,
Let those have night, that love the night:

Sweet

Phosphore reddie Diem.

O chase the gloomy Shades of Night away,
Sweet Phosphor, to our Sphere return the Day.

Figure 3. Part of "Emblem XIV: O chase the gloomy Shades of Night away,/Sweet Phosphor, to our Sphere return the Day"[70], in Quarles, Francis. *Emblems, divine and moral: together with the hieroglyphics of man.* London: Alex Hogg, 1790, 50-51. Source: Archive.org. Accessed February 17, 2022. https://archive.org/details/quarlesemblemsdi00quar/page/50/mode/2up

Metaphysical poets discussed angels and stones profusely: the lodestone, inspired by erotic emblems[71], became widely employed by Donne, while Herbert defines man as "a quick coal/Of mortall fire" in "Employment II"[72]. In a more canonical image, hearts represented the hard stone mellowed only by God's graciousness, as in Herbert's "The Altar"[73]: "A HEART alone/ Is such a stone, / As nothing but/Thy pow'r doth cut". More specific heart emblems also became popular in Holland among the Jesuit writers, and reflected human sins[74]: they could be filled with shattered glass (Donne, "The Broken Heart"[75]), bleeding or even colonised by insects and snakes and then freed by Jesus. Hearts could even catch fire, as is the case for the angels': Donne's "The Holy Ghost" in "The Litanie", as well as Crashaw's "The Flaming Heart" exemplify this image[76].

As in the previous cases, then, man is confronted with a surprising vision, something that denies his hopes and expectations and yet turns anger into a splendid, sublime spectacle.

4.4. Sloth

The first man leaps the ditch. (Who wins this race
Wins laurel, but laurel dies.)
The next falls in (who in his hour of grace
Plucked out his offending eyes.)
The blind still lead. (Consider the ant's ways;
Consider, and be wise.)[77]

From the terrifying atmosphere of God's final judgement, the emblems move to a subject that seems to leave more room for humour, "Sloth". The poem, which describes people caught in movement, is ironically set next to the still representation of a man of massive proportions; his overweight body, accentuated by the black and white contrast of the engraving, fills most of the picture, and is fully naked, except for a laurel crown decorating the head. Although this attribute, usually conferred to poets and equally mentioned in the text,

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68 From the conclusion to "A Preface to *Paradise Lost*", in Gordon Teskey ed., *Paradise Lost: A Norton Critical Edition* (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 437.

69 Eddinger describes angelic representation in *Encyclopedia of time*, ed. James Birx (Thousand Oaks; London; Delhi: Sage Publications 2009), I:18.

70 Psalm XIII.3: *Lighten my eyes, o Lord, lest I sleep the sleep of death.* "Will't never be morning? will that promis'd light/Ne'er break, and clear those clouds of night?/Sweet Phosphor, bring the day,/Whose conqu'ring ray/May chase these fogs; sweet Phosphor, bring the day./ How long! how long shall these benighted eyes/ Languish in shades, like feeble flies/Expecting spring? How long shall darkness soil/The face of earth, and thus beguile/Our fools or sprightful action? When, when will day/Begin to dawn, whose new-born ray/May gild the weathercocks of our devotion,/And five our unsoul'd souls new motion? Sweet Phosphor, bring the day;/ Thy light will fray/These horrid mists; Sweet Phosphor, bring the day./ Let those have night, that slily love t'immure/Their cloister'd crimes, and sin secure;/Let those have night, that blush to let men know/The baseness they ne'er blush to do;/Let those have night, that love to have a nap,/And loll in ignorance's lap;/Let those, whose eyes, lie owl, abhor the light,/Let those have night, that love the night […]".

71 Lederer, "John Donne and the Emblematic Practice", 188-189.

72 George Herbert, "Employment II", *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. Francis E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 78-79.

73 George Herbert, "The Altar", *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. Francis E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 26.

74 Lederer, "John Donne and the Emblematic Practice", 185-187.

75 Donne, *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, 144-146.

76 Donne, *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, 496-516; Crashaw, *The Complete Works of Richard Crashaw*, ed. Alexander Balloch Grosart (London: Robson and Sons, 1872), 152-156.

77 For the emblem of sloth, see Leonard Baskin, "Sloth", in Anthony Hecht, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Gehenna Press, 1958), accessed February 9, 2023, https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/seven-deadly-sins-book-sloth-1502.

traditionally hints at their ability to elevate themselves and reach ethereal worlds far beyond that of concrete reality, this symbol of mental levity is counteracted and made useless in relation to the earthly weight of the body itself. Moreover, the laurel can also symbolise the mundane celebration of fame. The graceful flights of the imagination seem thus to be interrupted for the man of letters by his preoccupation with materiality, fame and recognition, his soul trapped into and inhibited by the heavy cage of the flesh.

In the same fashion as "Wrath", the sestet maintains a set of correspondences in its rhyme scheme which is interrupted in the penultimate line where the enigmatic and yet proverbial motto is introduced, while following the alternating metrical pattern of "Envy". Although the theme would suggest slowness, the anecdote is based on a circular movement which makes it comically misleading, directed towards no aim or achievement. This movement is also suggested by the six lines, functioning in turn as performance and commentary, which are linked in two undivided stanzas in *terza rima*, ABAB-CB. The action is provided by concise and clear statements, at the beginning of odd lines, followed, after the caesura, by a parenthetical qualification which offers a commentary of the main statement and ends, lazily postponing its completion through the enjambment, in the following line, and halting the thought.

The story is outlined in the first two statements ("the first man leaps the ditch"; "the next falls in") which, positioned at the beginning of each sentence and odd line, present us visually with a sort of sport competition observed in sequence ("first"; "next"), or a riddle. In this, the poem follows the structure and moral opposition typical of epigrams:

> Two went to pray? O rather say
> One went to brag, th' other to pray:
>
> One stands up close and treads on high,
> Where th' other dares not send his eye.
>
> One nearer to God's altar trod,
> The other to the altar's God.[78]

Although Hecht's architecture is more complex, due to continuous internal references, Crashaw's text shows the same taste for contrariety, both semantic ("one" and "th'other", "say" and "pray", "brag" and "pray") and visual, through the final chiasm and wordplay. Most interestingly, it also draws from biblical anecdotes (Luke 18), although it maintains a clear distinction between good and evil behaviour, expressed by the final joke.

In Hecht's emblem, by contrast, as the reader progressively learns about the actions of the first and second man, his expectations for a third participant or for a conclusion on the performance of the first two are denied, and substituted in the third phrase by an assertion, the *inscriptio* of the poem, which defeats the whole purpose of the competition instead: "the blind still lead". The attention is shifted to a third protagonist in first position, before unmentioned, who annuls their efforts all the while being decisively oxymoronic, a blind man who leads the blind.

The parenthetical asides comment on the action by providing details which are not essential to the understanding of the main sentence, creating redundancy. The same effect is achieved by the repetition of "laurel" which appears twice in line 2 in chiastic position, if only visually. The mirroring effect produced by its repeated presence, along with the verbs "wins" and "dies" further suggests the aimlessness of the competition, which will eventually be ineffective.

The act of plucking out one's eyes may seem incompatible, to a modern reader, with the idea of "grace", and the act of falling into a ditch after getting rid of "offensive eyes" seems counterintuitive at least. The image is made the more puzzling by the statement according to which "the blind still lead".

The reader must ultimately interpret these representations of blindness in both religious and metaphorical terms. The act of "leaping the ditch" appears in Matthew 15:14: "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch". The sentence once again is found in the Gospels and in relation to the debate between Christians and Pharisees, and is quoted in another one of Hecht's poems[79]. The latter hypocritically question Jesus about not washing his hands, while they follow the commandments in theory but not in practice, showing indolence. It is, somehow, the behaviour Hecht finds exemplified in the story of Jacob and Laban and which he also attributes to Shylock, a literal and not conscientious interpretation of the Law[80]. The ditch is here a metaphor for error, and, in a wider perspective, for Hell. As Avery[81] noted, the laurel will be reproduced much later in the engravings for "Death the Poet", from *The Presumptions of Death*, although crowning a skull, signalling transient fame. As noted, this plant is suggestive of glory and achievement, especially in the arts, perhaps referring to poetry's power of immortality, which is only apparent and limited. The mention of laurel could also be a reference to Psalm 37:35-36 in the English Standard Version: "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green laurel. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found". This is also quoted in "Words for the Day of Atonement", in "Rites and Ceremonies[82]", though under the name "Bay tree", following King James' version. Clements notes that artists and exegetes ascribed new properties to it and gave it an enlarged meaning in the wake of Alciatus, who was still influenced by Petrarch's imagery. In this tradition, the laurel stands for everlasting youth and represents the diligent poet, able to see clearly[83].

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78 Richard Crashaw, "Two went up into the Temple to Pray", in *The Complete Works of Richard Crashaw*, ed. Alexander Balloch Grosart (London: Robson and Sons, 1872), 35.

79 "Three Prompters from the Wings", in Hecht, *Collected Earlier Poems*, 22-29, from *The Hard Hours* suggests that the ambition towards "perfect bliss" is ruined by the blind behaviour of man.

80 Hecht, "Obbligati", 186-187.

81 Avery, "Imagination and Violence in The Poetry of Anthony Hecht", 119.

82 Hecht, *Collected Earlier Poems*, 38-47, from *The Hard Hours*.

83 Clements, *Picta Poesis*, 43.

Finally, the act of plucking out one's eyes comes from another teaching by Jesus, reported in Matthew 5:29: "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell". We are therefore presented with a metaphorical blindness to the true meaning of the Law –which allows men to avoid action and still comply, on the surface, to the guiding principle, but has in fact real consequences– and a physical blindness with moral consequences, which consists in the naive attempt to eliminate the source of all evil by directly eliminating all the media of physical perception. Metaphorical and concrete implications are mismatched in this poem to a satirical effect, where those who have sacrificed their real eyes to be saved fall, due to their limited vision, into a ditch that should have been symbolical.

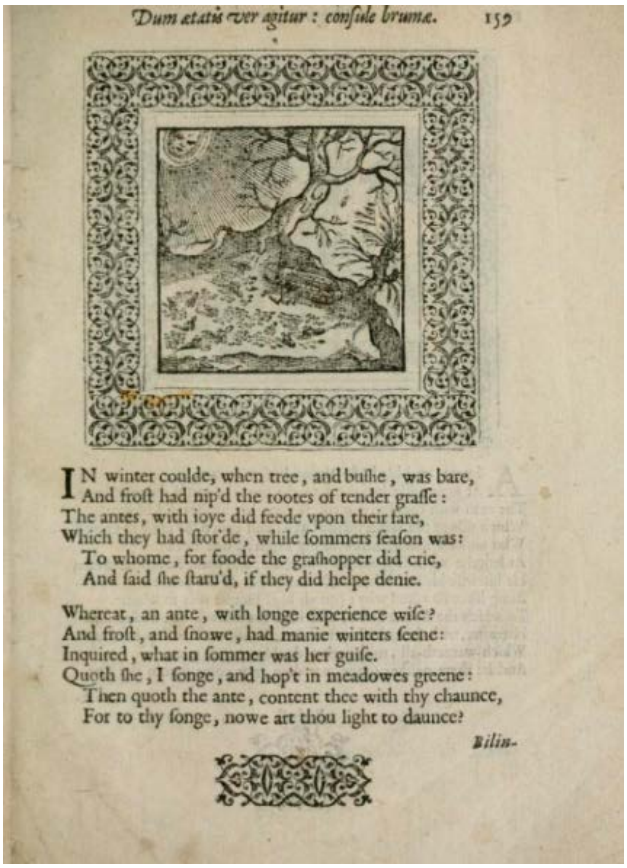
Overall, the author denounces the attitude of all those who follow a lead "blindly" to be excused from action and responsibility. At the same time, the uselessness of all attempts to go through life with glory or at least without sin speaks on a deeper level of the impossibility, on man's side, to accomplish anything entirely good or successful. Blindness therefore becomes a cover, but also a punishment, and sometimes the only solution against despair. Perhaps the poem echoes the stories of Lear and Oedipus, two of Hecht's favourite tragedies, but the tradition of blindness related to a sense of insufficiency in tackling the horrors of human life is proverbial in his production: Peter Sacks signals "'Three Prompters', the corpse in 'Birdwatchers', the blindfolded figure in 'The Origin of Centaurs', the effigy of Valerian with 'blanks of mother-of-pearl' under the eyelids (as opposed to the speaker who was not allowed to close his eyes), the 'Blind head of bone' in 'Tarantula'[…] the soot-covered eyes of the dead Pole in 'More Light!'"[84].

The structural and syntactical division between past and present, or first and second, also found in "Pride", might also suggest yet another example of failed typological circularity: while the first man, Adam, has managed to "leap the ditch", meaning to avoid eternal death, his new counterpart, Christ, who is ready to sacrifice himself entirely, falls into it. Although this has taken place, there are still people who will behave blindly, as Michael predicts in the final vision in *Paradise Lost*[85]; however, differently from his account, Hecht's poem does not mention Christ's final victory over death, preserving untouched the sense of aimlessness which causes sloth.

Against this behaviour, and yet tempting us to another role model, the voice guides us in the "right" direction, with a maxim: "Consider the ant's ways;/Consider, and be wise". This statement, taken from a passage in Proverbs 6:6-11 suitably entitled "Sloth", offers a contrasting perspective:

Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.

The proverb makes up the third phrase in between brackets, serving as a commentary, or hint, for the image of the blind man leading the blind. The ant has "no guide, overseer, or ruler" and does not embrace blindness as a way to careless forgetfulness. The ant, from Aesop's fables, is one of the most widely diffused emblematic subjects (Fig. 4). As Clements states[86], it appears in the *Horapollo* as a symbol of knowledge and common sense, tied in with the image of the laurel-bearing poet.


Dum ætatis ver agitur : consule brumæ. 159

IN winter coulde, when tree, and bushe, was bare,
And froſt had nip'd the rootes of tender graſſe:
The antes, with ioye did feede vpon their fare,
Which they had ſtor'de, while ſommers ſeaſon was:
To whome, for foode the graſhopper did crie,
And ſaid ſhe ſtaru'd, if they did helpe denie.

Whereat, an ante, with longe experience wiſe?
And froſt, and ſnowe, had manie winters ſeene:
Inquired, what in ſommer was her guiſe.
Quoth ſhe, I ſonge, and hop't in meadowes greene:
Then quoth the ante, content thee with thy chaunce,
For to thy ſonge, nowe art thou light to daunce?

Bilin-

Figure 4. "Dum aetatis ver agitur: consule brumae" ("In the Spring of life, prepare for Autumn")[87], in Whitney, Geoffrey. *A Choice of Emblemes, and other devises: For the moste parte gathered out of sundrie writers, Englished and Moralized. And divers newly devised.* Leyden: Christopher Plantyn, 1586, 159. Source: Archive.org. Accessed February 17, 2022. https://archive.org/details/choiceofemblemes00whit/page/158/mode/2up

[84] Peter Sacks, "Millions of Strange Shadows: Anthony Hecht as Gentile and Jew", in *The Burdens of Formality: Essays on the Poetry of Anthony Hecht*, ed. Sidney Lea (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 90-91.

[85] Book XII, vv. 285-465, in Teskey ed., *Paradise Lost*.

[86] Clements, *Picta Poesis*, 89.

[87] "In winter coulde, when tree, and bushe, was bare,/And frost had nip'd the rootes of tender grasse:/The antes, with ioye did feede upon their fare,/Which they had stor'de, while sommers season was:/To whome, for foode the grasshopper did crie,/And said she starv'd, if they did helpe denie./Whereat, an ante, with longe experience wise,/And frost, and snowe, had manie winters seene:/Inquired, what in sommer was her guise./Quoth she, I songe, and hop't in meadowes greene:/The quoth the ante, content thee with thy chaunce,/Fot to thy songe, nowe art thou light to daunce".

Its exemplary role then fades a little against the failing circularity of the previous examples, suggesting above all that such slothfulness may be the mere acceptance of the fallibility of life, a life in which the laurel one has gained "dies" and even the teachings of Jesus do not allow for a fully satisfactory solution, as the rhyming dies/eyes/wise and race/grace suggest. The overall feeling of the poem is a feeling of religious helplessness, the kind that led Herbert to write: "my deare angrie Lord,/Since thou dost love, yet strike;/Cast down, yet help afford/[…] I will complain, yet praise;/I will bewail, approve"[88]. "Not seeing" is the human counterpart of God's "no hearing"[89], expressed in the opposition of God's trials for humanity in terms of stolid obedience, a lazy acceptance or resignation with our fate, which finally leaves man with no guide at all.

4.5. Avarice

The penniless Indian fakirs and their camels
Slip through the needle's eye
To bliss (for neither flesh nor spirit trammels
Such as are prone to die)
And from emaciate heaven they behold
Our sinful kings confer
Upon an infant huge tributes of gold
And frankincense and myrrh[90].

"Avarice" is written in the same trimeter/pentameter alternation of "Sloth" and "Envy", and it is the longest of the poems, suggesting a desire for accumulation. The rhyme scheme is ABABCDCD, with eight couplets split in two quatrains, an incomplete Shakespearian sonnet whose rhyme change corresponds to a change of mind in the protagonists. After the more generic subjects of the previous poems, a group other than the terrible heavenly host of "Wrath" is featured here, as the protagonists are fakirs. Just as the messengers of God seem at first to be at odds with the sin they describe, the fakirs, originally Muslim ascetics who have taken the vows of poverty and worship, do not seem to be a suitable example for greed. As in the cases of "Envy" and "Sloth", their sin is never directly referred to in the poem, as it develops as a sort of compulsion, through examples and modes of behaviour.

In this case, as in the previous, Baskin pursues a different iconological tradition from Hecht while maintaining some similarities. He portrays avarice as a man covered in wolf-skin, and yet caught in the act of prayer or perhaps with his hands cupped to count and hold onto his riches. The human hands and the jaw of the beast, resting on top of the man's head, point in the same direction, and align in the middle of the circular frame, splitting the *pictura* into two. The two bodily parts of fingers and fangs are connected not only visually but also symbolically, in their potential to "grasp" and retain objects. The hungry wolf symbolises avarice in Dante's *Comedy*; wolves were known at the time for not sharing their prey, and were believed to often steal the food of other animals. In nature, such insatiability is caused by a maddening hunger, and a similar contradiction is mirrored in the meaning of the poem. Moreover, the fur acts as a disguise for the man in the picture, hinting at covetousness and cunning, and this particular, when paired with the praying hands, introduces the satire of faith which runs through the collection to the poem. In the *Inferno*, the demon of avarice, Pluto, is called a "wolf"[91], and the canto satirises the greedy who forsake the Christian value of *Caritas*, amongst which, most prominently, is the clergy[92]. Milton himself referred to careless priests as wolves in *Lycidas*[93], and used the animal in *Paradise Lost*[94] as a metaphor for Satan. The association of this animal with men of the church occurs as early as Ezekiel 22:27.

The fakirs stand visually in the middle of the first line, in opposition to "the sinful kings" in the same position in line 6. The first attribute described is their condition as "penniless", stated even before their origins, and they physically share the line with their only companions, "their camels". The two, compared, after the fashion of mediaeval bestiaries, for their ability to spend much time without food and to survive under harsh conditions, are equated in the act of slipping "through the needle's eye". The saying refers to another parable of Christ in response to a rich man asking him the way to grace, related in Matthew 19: 20-24:

> The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

A camel will be graced before a rich man, and so the fakirs, whose very title contains the word "poverty" (*faqr*, in Arabic) in it, are immediately granted a place. Ironically, while the camel entering the eye of the needle is chosen for its largeness in order to hyperbolically stress the impossibility of such an action for the rich, the fakirs are, by contrast, slipping through due to their literal slightness.

The "eye" of the needle also acts as a metaphorical gate to Heaven, projecting them "to bliss". There is

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88 Herbert, "Bitter-Sweet", in *The Works of George Herbert,* ed. Francis E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 171.

89 George Herbert, "Denial", in *The Works of George Herbert,* ed. Francis E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 79.

90 For the emblem of avarice, see Leonard Baskin, "Avarice", in Anthony Hecht, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Gehenna Press, 1958), accessed February 9, 2023, https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/seven-deadly-sins-book-avarice-1497.

91 Dante, *Inferno*, Canto VII, v. 8.

92 *Enciclopedia Dantesca Treccani*, s.v.: "Lupo e lupa", accessed Nov. 5, 2022, http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/lupo-e-lupa_%28Enciclopedia-Dantesca%29/.

93 John Milton, *Lycidas* vv. 125-130, in *Seventeenth-century British Poetry 1603-1660: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Gregory Chaplin and John Rumrich (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006).

94 John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, vv.180-185.

consistency between literal and spiritual meaning: as their meagre figures concretely facilitate their passage, they also mirror their spiritual moderation. As Herbert, someone who wrote about "ascetic renunciation"[95] remarks, "A Christian state and case/Is not corpulent, but a thinne and spare,/Yet active strength" with a "long and bonie face[96]". The parenthesis, opening on the topics of both flesh and soul, suggests that both sides of them are "prone to die", highlighting their intention as well as their actual physical bent towards the objective, as they have stopped feeding themselves completely. As a matter of fact, their apparent asceticism betrays a greater greed for the richness promised by Christ: the "treasure in heaven", a "bliss" above all material compensation. The word "die" closes the first introductory quatrain, marking the passage from action to reaction and from life to death. All throughout, the act of looking is echoed by the words "eye" and "behold", perhaps hiding the pun eye/I in relation to "die", which with "behold" and "gold", explains the whole content of the poem. While the first part describes a movement from low to high, both physically and spiritually, in the second section the complement "from emaciate heaven", another oxymoronic coupling, conveys the opposite tension, from above to below. Moreover, the now dead fakirs are not opposed to kings in general, but to "our […] kings", shared by the speaker and by all temporal beings. They are, finally, opposed to Christ, the newborn who has come to the earth from heaven.

The "sinful kings" here mentioned are specifically the Magi, although the term applies to all earthly kings; the title is made more relevant here by its confrontation with that of the unspoken "true king", an infant. These wise men traditionally represent the stranger, or earthbound man struggling to understand the significance of the miraculous birth, as in Eliot's representation of them[97].

The relations triggered by the verbs "behold and confer" are threefold, set in a sort of chain: the fakirs "behold" the "sinful kings confer" "upon an infant", and ground themselves into the scene to the point of almost being an extension of the Magi's arms. At the same time, the exaggeration of the Magi's gift is conveyed in the structure of the penultimate line, where the received gift, the object, is placed in second position after the receiver, "an infant", to keep it in focus. The word "infant", referring to Christ in the specific situation but chosen to sound completely casual and to emphasise the image of smallness, becomes even more an index of absurdity as it comes right before the word "huge", indicating the sum of gold to which he is entitled. The word "gold", moreover, the last in the line, is only the beginning of the conventional treasures poured out and leaking through enjambment into the final line: the sense of overabundance is conveyed by the repetition of the conjunction "and", and the images of "frankincense and myrrh" close the poem, opposed to the misery of the fakirs in their colour and nature – white flesh against gold and spices. The different states of material richness and poverty should find their counterpart in turn in their spiritual poverty and richness, according to parables[98]. Herbert's "The Size" stresses this balancing act:

> What though some have a fraught
> Of cloves and nutmegs, and in cinamon sail;
> If thou hast wherewithall to spice a draught,
> When griefs prevail;
> And for the future time art heir
> To th' Isle of spices, is 't not fair?
>
> To be in both worlds full
> Is more then God was, who was hungrie here.

In this case, however, while the "sinful kings" and Christ possess all such spices, the fakirs never find satisfaction – because of their extreme asceticism, or perhaps because of their mind "bent" on conservation, and never on indulgence, even in death.

It is significant to note how the fakirs, discarding Christ as a mere "infant", focus all their attention on the profusion of gifts, and on the gifts themselves. There is, in fact, as Auden has argued[99], a second and more meaningful side to looking, that of adoration: while the Magi are contemplating the son of God, the fakirs are worshipping his richness, as a new Golden Calf. This goes against the teaching of Jesus in Luke 16:13 (also Matthew 6:24): "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon".

The Magi have followed a shining star to the "true sun", the fakirs –a word which might hide a pun, hinting at falseness– cannot help showing an interest in material gold. In defining heaven "emaciate", in fact, Hecht may be referring to the tradition of Christ as light hinted in the wordplay sun/son typical of so many poems of the Renaissance. Crashaw's nativity hymn mentioned above presents the baby as "Summer in winter; day in night/ Heaven in earth, and God in man"; Williamson notes that in a similar poem, "A Hymn For The Epiphany Sung As By The Three Kings", the Magi end the false worship that took the sun as a source rather than a symbol of light[100]. Donne also employs this pun extensively, in "La Corona", "The Litanie", "A Hymn to God the Father", "To Christ" and "Goodfriday 1613"[101]. The Son as "sun" is, moreover, a commonplace of emblems (Fig. 5). By contrast, here the fakirs take on the previous role of the

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95 Anthony Hecht, "Letter to Daniel Albright on January 4, 1994," in *The Selected Letters of Anthony Hecht*, ed. Jonathan Post (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), 261-262.

96 "The Size", in *The Works of George Herbert,* ed. Francis E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 137-138.

97 Thomas S. Eliot, "The Journey of the Magi", in *The Poems of T.S. Eliot: Volume I*, eds. Christopher Ricks and Jim Mccue (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), 101-102.

98 As in the parable of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus, in Luke 16:19-31, also used by Crashaw for his epigram "Upon Lazarus his Tears" in *The Complete Works of Richard Crashaw*, ed. Alexander Balloch Grosart (London: Robson and Sons, 1872), II: 55.

99 A notion Auden explored in "Pride and Prayer" mentioned, among other sources, in "Paralipomena to The Hidden Law", in Hecht, *Melodies Unheard*, 139.

100 George Williamson, *A Reader's Guide to The Metaphysical Poets* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967), 136.

101 Lederer, "John Donne and the Emblematic Practice", 188-191.

kings, worshipping material gold instead of true gold. Tuve[102] notes that in Herbert's "To All Angels and Saints" the Virgin becomes "the cabinet where the Jewell lay". She argues that "Gold as restorative, Christ as gold, Christ as medicine are conventions".

Figure 5. "Mentis sol amor dei" ("The love of God is the sun of the soul")[103], in Vaenius, Otto. *Amoris Divini Emblemata.* Antverpiae: Ex officina Plantiniana, Balthasaris Moreti, 1660, 18-19, as mentioned in Bertonasco, 35-36. "*Si el sol del alma es Amor,/ La que de Dios se desuia/No diga que goza dia*" ("if the sun of the soul is Love, the soul which strays from God shall not say that it enjoys its days"). Source: Archive.org. Accessed February 17, 2022. https://archive.org/details/amorisdiviniembl00veeno/page/18/mode/2up

Overall, like the wolves, the fakirs adapt to poor nutrition due to their condition, and make it holy through idealisation; their true intentions are revealed in the way in which, dissatisfied in finding the same state of life once in heaven, they look with desire at a profusion of gold near the creature who is most worthy of their attention. In a way, Hecht is parodying the behaviour of religious extremists, who preach directions without accounting for the limits of human nature and end up betraying their own self-interest in the process. In his "Moby-Dick" essay, he mentions the Calvinists' use of a quotation from Proverbs (22:29): "Seest thou a diligent man in his business? He shall stand before kings". These are people who preach, as Weber explains in *The Protestant Ethic*: "the earning of more and more money, combined with strict avoidance of all spontaneous enjoyment of life[104]", and their "standing before kings" is parodied in this scene. At the same time, the paradox of giving gold to a child balances their fault by denouncing the useless lavishness of prodigality in contrast to a poverty which is often decided by the circumstances, and which has led popular imagination to picture the manna falling from the sky as golden coins[105].

4.6. Gluttony

> Let the poor look to themselves, for it is said
> Their savior wouldn't turn stones into bread.
> And let the sow continually say grace.
> For moss shall build in the lung and have no trace,
> The glutton worm shall tunnel in the head
> And eat the Word out of the parchment face[106].

Another vision of misery is portrayed and satirized in "Gluttony", the penultimate emblem. The plate for this poem is the only one in which the picture itself takes life, and plays into the concept of rotundity by acquiring the sow's legs: the effect is that of the frame having ingested its subject, or of the image leaking out of it. Although animals are portrayed in most of the plates and often referred to in poems, this is one of the only cases in which the *pictura* and the *subscriptio* align, perhaps because of the popularity of the association between pigs and insatiability, often found in the tradition of the Seven Deadly Sins and in the Scriptures as well as in popular culture.

The poem is another sestet, with rhyme scheme AABBAB. As in previous cases, the structure partly mimics the sense of the poem, marking two different syntactic and semantic units (the heroic couplets) which converge in the ending. The first couplet opens with an exhortation in biblical style, but carrying a rather bitter and ironic message: in a religion based on *Caritas*, the one denied by the fakirs in "Avarice", the poor must "look to themselves"; the syntactical construct is reminiscent of promising prophecies such as "Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them! For the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14), whose meaning, however, is reversed in the present case.

Looking after one's own salvation contrasts with the presence of a "saviour" whose act of turning "stones into bread", taken from a biblical anecdote in Matthew 4:3, is not dependent on inability but on unwillingness. The poem uses the paradox typical of epigrams though in negative terms: it is opposed, as an example, to Crashaw's "On the Miracle of multiplied Loaves", in which "bread" is not made of stone but is "unbounded", the continuous act of thanksgiving is turned into an "easy feast" and the hunger that here leaves "no trace" there causes "no wound"[107]. Nor is Christ the one who

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[102] Rosemond Tuve, *A Reading of George Herbert* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), 143.

[103] "What the sun is for the senses, Love is for the mind; the way the sun shines on everything that is on earth, in order for us to see it, so does the Love of God reveal the intelligible. Due to carnal love Solomon lost his wisdom, which he had conquered through spiritual love: since the way desire brings darkness, charity is luminous. Charity is the strength of faith, faith is the vigour of charity: they sustain and bring light to one another; this is akin to the perfect flight of two twin wings, through which the purity of the mind is elevated to the merit and vision of God".

[104] "Moby-Dick", in Hecht, *Melodies Unheard*, 226-227.

[105] Donne's Sermon CXI, "Preached to the Countess of Bedford" (*The Complete Poems of John Donne*, 537-556): "God scatters not his blessings, as princes do money, in donatives at coronations or triumphs, without respect upon whom they shall fall. God rained down manna and quails, plentifully, abundantly".

[106] For the emblem of gluttony, see Leonard Baskin, "Gluttony", in Anthony Hecht, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Gehenna Press, 1958), accessed February 9, 2023, https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/seven-deadly-sins-book-gluttony-1499.

[107] Richard Crashaw, "On the Miracle of multiplied Loaves", in *The Complete Works of Richard Crashaw*, ed. Alexander Balloch Grosart (London: Robson and Sons, 1872), II: 40.

turns water into wine, but rather the devil, who undoes the process through "wrath and strife"[108], no longer "friend" but "foe". Once again, martyrdom is conferred upon the human subjects, and God becomes paradoxically the recipient of things he does not need ("Avarice") or unhelpful ("Gluttony") due to standardised rules.

Hecht has elsewhere[109] described this as "the temptation to deal with poverty through miracles", as "a rejection of the God-created universe, and a form of pride". The issue, however, stands as always in the true impossibility of synthesising the human and the spiritual, so that while Christ can survive without food for forty days, a regular man has no concrete possibility of showing the same act of faith, but is still required to follow his example.

The third line, shorter than the others, is another brief admonition, with repetition of the formulaic "let". In this case, the subjects are not the poor, whose only resort are inedible stones, but the sow. Although the pig is usually associated with gluttony, its feminine counterpart is especially often portrayed in emblem books[110] (Fig. 6.), and its maternal quality strengthens its connection with fertility and nourishment. It should be remembered, moreover, that pigs, as Hecht suggests in his poem of that title, are considered a dirty animal in Hebrew culture, which cannot be eaten, lest they make a man impure in turn. According to Barber, "the sow represents the sinner and luxurious liver if we understand Solomon rightly: 'As a jewel of golf in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion'. (Proverbs 11:22). The sow thinks on carnal things: from her thoughts wicked or wasteful deeds result. As in Isaiah: 'A people […] which eat swine flesh, and broth of abominable things in their vessels (65:3-4) that is, in their hearts'"[111].

As Brown[112] remarks, animals were especially featured in emblem books so that man would turn from their beastly behaviour to what was best for his soul. In this case, however, as in "Pig", animals are victims of the harsh reality of life and of other creatures, and man shares their same destiny.

This omnivorous animal is asked to perform a rather human act, to "continually say grace". Grace is the ritual thanksgiving prayer to be recited before meals, but the following context almost turns it into a desperate request for safety, unlikely to be granted according to the rhyme "grace"/ "no trace". The reiterative value of the act may be explained by the only apparition of the sow in the Bible, suggesting its continuous return to "bad habits": "But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog *is* turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire" (2 Peter 2:22).

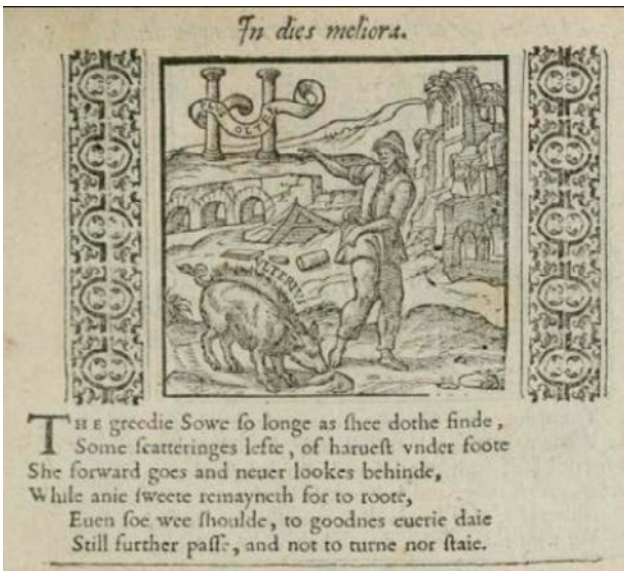

Figure 6. "In dies meliora" ("The best in every day")[113], in Whitney, Geoffrey. *A Choice of Emblemes, and other devises: For the moste parte gathered out of sundrie writers, Englished and Moralized. And divers newly devised.* Leyden: Christopher Plantyn, 1586, 53. Source: Archive.org. Accessed February 17, 2022. https://archive.org/details/choiceofemblemes00whit/page/52/mode/2up

As the rhyming pattern denotes, the two prophecies unite in one final *sententia*, which occupies the last three lines and unites men with pig. To this effect, Hecht chooses the parable of the temptation instead of the various multiplications of food and drink described in the Bible. Ultimately, the last three lines suggest the merging of animal and human mentioned above according to the mediaeval vision of life in which the act of eating, like the round plate of the illustration or the belly of the fat woman in it, comes full circle. As humans, like pigs, eat, they are eaten in turn by minuscule bacteria, spreading like a disease inside of them. The moss building in the lung to "leave no trace" may refer to the mere act of decomposition, a sort of still decay, but more specifically it may hint at pig pneumonia –a bacterial infection common in sows–, attacking the lungs and often spread to the piglets through lactation, turning feeding into an act of contagion[114]. In the same way, the "glutton worm" –a reference to Satan, or to Cerberus, the "great worm" in Dante's circle of gluttony in the sixth canto of the *Inferno* (vv. 13-33), or perhaps the simple tapeworm, also common in pigs– will "tunnel in the head". Any distinction between species is left behind, and what remains is simply the destructive action of infesting agents, "moss" and "worm", strangely expressed in architectural terms (build in the lung, tunnel in the head) to convey their work of conquest and embodiment. As Raber explains, "overconsumption of

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108 Richard Crashaw, "To Our Lord upon The Water Made Wine", in *The Complete Works of Richard Crashaw*, ed. Alexander Balloch Grosart (London: Robson and Sons, 1872), II: 135.

109 Anthony Hecht, "On Auden's In Praise of Limestone", in *Obbligati Essays on Criticism* (New York: Atheneum, 1986), 37.

110 Hassig, *The Mark of the Beast*, 73.

111 Richard Barber, *Bestiary: being an English version of the Bodleian Library* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), 86.

112 Carmen Brown, "Bestiary Lessons on Pride and Lust" in *The Mark of The Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life and Literature*, ed. Debra Hassig (New York, London: Garland Publishing, 2000), 54.

113 "The greedie sowe for longe as shee dothe finde/Some scatterings lefte, of harvest under foote/She forward goes and never lookes behinde,/While anie sweete remayneth for to roote,/Even soe wee shoulde, to goodness everie daie/Still further passe, and not to turne nor staie".

114 "Porcine enzootic pneumonia", accessed Dec. 21, 2022, http://lrd.spc.int/ext/Disease_Manual_Final/enzootic_pneumonia_of_pigs.html.

meat was associated with sin, for which worms were in turn considered an appropriate punishment"[115].

Recalling Christ's lesson that man shall live by the words of God, quoted above, Hecht ironically makes sure to revert to reality even the most potentially symbolic of nourishments, as the worms or parasites featured in the poem "eat the Word out of the parchment face"[116]. The satire behind the image is that, when food is lacking, humanity cannot survive on hope only. Hecht rejects, by implication, the metaphors that associate the dialogue with God as "the church's banquet" or "exalted manna"[117], to insist on the grotesque and surreal aspects of the relationship between human and divine. The physical world becomes the focus, and any spiritual condition is represented in practical terms and embodied in reality, as is the case in other images by Herbert: "At first thou gav'st me milk and sweetnesses;/ I had my wish and way". In Herbert's poetry, God's absence is often represented as occupying the chamber of the body as an illness: "but then […] My flesh began unto my soul in pain,/"Sicknesses cleave my bones;/Consuming agues dwell in ev'ry vein, and tune by breath to groans"[118]. However, while the Metaphysical poet objectifies his pain as bodily to create a simple conceit, Hecht does the same parodically, insisting on the fact that the rigorous teachings of scripture simply cannot be put into practice when interpreted literally.

The addition of the term "parchment" is suggestive of man as a simple piece of paper given meaning only by God's words on it, as well as of flesh dried out of all its juices – as parchment is nothing but sheep skin. Along with the tunnelling worm and the consuming moss, this image reinforces once again the concepts of expropriation and conquest.

Overall, this cycle belonging completely to nature defies and counterfeits the ideal process of death and rebirth of the spirit brought about by the sacrifice of Christ and as reported in Scripture. Even if we abstain from excess of food, other creatures will consume our body and, it is suggested, our soul. Even as the poor and the sow, like the soul of Herbert's poem, try to turn their "purge to food", with no help, God throws them "into more sicknesses". God expects worship from man, but then, forgetful, allows mankind to die hungry and consumed by other hungry creatures, unable to escape his terrestrial condition. As Hecht remarks, bitterly, in another poem: "Is not that pastoral instruction sweet/ Which says who shall be eaten, who shall eat?"[119].

4.7. Lust

> The Phoenix knows no lust, and Christ, our mother,
> Suckles his children with his vintage blood.
> Not to be such a One is to be other[120].

The final emblem, "Lust", is also the shortest in the collection, and the only one presenting an odd number of iambic pentameter lines, in rhyme scheme ABA. The plate is reminiscent of the content of the text, as it portrays an androgynous man with a prosperous, sexualized body revealing both masculine and feminine features; his cloth, fallen too far down, fails to hide his sex, and his sides are covered in long, angelic or bird-like feathers, while the head shows luscious hair and a beard, perhaps reminiscent of some representations of Christ. All these elements prefigure and synthesise the main concepts around which the poem revolves.

The poem is, once again, based on a comparison and a contradiction and follows the same structure as "Avarice". The figures of the "Phoenix", capitalised, and of "Christ", sharing the first line, are here compared without any explicit link; a comparison built through one single element for a whole anecdote is certainly witty, a small conceit. The mysterious quality of the emblem, which never explicitly states the moral or the terms of the association, is also a traditional feature. The phoenix, a beloved subject of metaphysical poets and emblematists alike, adds to the obscurity of the interpretation, as it is the typical example of a symbol comprehensive of multiple and often divergent meanings. It could stand for richness, fire or Arabia, but most frequently it represented, in the two prevalent streams of Baroque poetry, either the union of two lovers in a metaphorical body, in erotic poetry[121], or the resurrection of Christ, in religious texts. These two fields were not always distinct, and this is the contradiction played upon by Hecht.

In the Talmud, the phoenix was the only animal able to resist the temptation of Satan, by not eating the apple – a transgression caused by pride but ultimately manifested in lust. A more secular tradition, by contrast, pairs birds with the specific sin of lust as Dante's aviary metaphors in Canto V of the *Inferno* show. Among the Metaphysicals, Donne presents the phoenix as a symbol of the spiritual and physical union of the lovers in "The Canonization" and in his "Epithalamion for Lady Elizabeth"[122]. Along similar lines, it is featured in Crashaw's "In the Holy Nativity of Our Lord God", at the sight of the infant Christ sitting in the manger.

The image of the resurrecting bird, able to spring from its own ashes every 500 years, thus became a pow-

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115 Karen Raber, *Animal Bodies, Renaissance Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 114.

116 Parasites, infections and worms appear in a number of Hecht's poems. In "Japan" (*Collected Earlier Poems*, 76, from *A Summoning of Stones*) he describes the terrible faith of the population, affected by *Schistostomiasis Japonica*, an illness derived from the cultivation of rice in water containing traces of the people's excrements, and thus circulating endlessly ("This fruit of their nightsoil/Thrives in their skull"). An image close to that found in "Gluttony", where "To the far eye of God you are as base/As worms that dine and crawl upon your face" recurs in "Poem upon the Lisbon Disaster" (*Collected Earlier Poems*, 170-176, from *Millions of Strange Shadows*), a translation of Voltaire's poem.

117 George Herbert, "Prayer", in *The Works of George Herbert,* ed. Francis E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 51.

118 George Herbert, "Affliction", in *The Works of George Herbert,* ed. Francis E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 46-48.

119 Hecht, "Improvisations on Aesop".

120 For the emblem of lust, see Leonard Baskin, "Lust", in Anthony Hecht, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Gehenna Press, 1958), accessed February 9, 2023, https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/seven-deadly-sins-book-lust-1500.

121 A similar image is also found in Shakespeare's "The Phoenix and the Turtle", quoted by Hecht at the beginning of "The Short End", from *The Venetian Vespers.*

122 *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, 147-154; 627-637.

erful metaphor of both bodily and spiritual regeneration. Even if Christ, just like the phoenix, "knows no lust", both being above the temptation of the flesh and being able to recreate life from a single body, his reincarnation still implies two meanings: a sexless, chaste reproduction through resurrection or, in contrast, his representation as both male and female, making him hermaphroditic and overly sexualised, as he is portrayed in the *pictura*. After all, Christ is human, and as Paul reminds us: "There is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus"[123]. Hassig[124] explains in this regard that bestiaries matched animals with either Satan or Christ according to their supposed concupiscence; the phoenix was usually seen as the purest of creatures, but at the same time hermaphroditic beasts were condemned as unclean figures. Just like the ambiguous Christ, moreover, the phoenix is connected with fire – the element typically associated with arousal of either anger or sexual desire.

This association of the phoenix with both sexuality and purity also found its counterpart in religious discussions[125] on the resurrection of the body along with the soul, a discussion that leaked in time into popular culture. Hecht himself, in his essay on *The Sonnet*, explains that "negotiations between these realms become a familiar literary device in the counter-reformation period". As previously mentioned, and in his own words, this brought about "a reversed effect, towards the desecration of the holy"[126], an effect here exemplified.

The two concepts of rebirth and of sexless reproduction, aligned in the image of the phoenix, are in fact found, among humans, in two figures only, the protagonists of the poem: Christ and the Virgin Mary. Christ is seen here from a physical perspective, not as a father or brother of humanity, as St. Paul would have it[127], but as our "mother", caught in the act of feeding, as he "suckles his children with his vintage blood". This strengthens the hermaphroditic quality suggested by the phoenix. The term vintage, in its etymology and in the present context, refers to wine and recalls religious ritual. The act of spiritual nourishment is in fact ritualised through the Eucharist, when the body of Christ is introduced into man's body through ingestion rather than sexual coitus, and he experiences a momentary death which is also a "passion", perhaps hinting at the *petite mort*. In this turn of events, thus, the word "suckle", in first position after the enjambment, describes the very act of a baby pumping milk out of his mother's breast and remarks on the inherent physicality involved in the acts of nurture and reproduction, birth and death, in their shedding of the same bodily fluids and especially of blood, here satirised through the worldly adjective "vintage". The image of wine in association with Christ insists on the sensual, savoury quality of his presence, as Hecht has noted, and belongs to the typological tradition of "Christ as grapes", expressed by Herbert[128].

Blood thus becomes the symbol of physicality, of nourishment and pain, uniting the two actions of violence and love, as in the emblematic selflessness of the pelican[129] (Fig. 7) another bird of Christian significance.

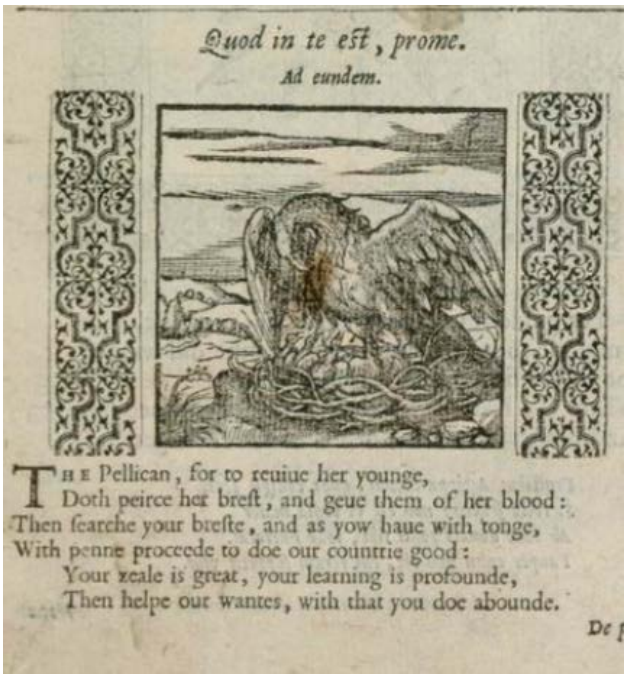

Figure 7. "Quod in te est, prome" ("Give all that you can")[130], in Whitney, Geoffrey. *A Choice of Emblemes, and other devises: For the moste parte gathered out of sundrie writers, Englished and Moralized. And divers newly devised.* Leyden: Christopher Plantyn, 1586, 87. Source: Archive.org. Accessed February 17, 2022. https://archive.org/details/choiceofemblemes00whit/page/86/mode/2up?q=quod+in+te+est

Religious writing commonly explored the idea of Christ as nourishment, as he gave his body to man through the ceremony of Eucharist: Calvin himself wrote "Christ is milk for infants and strong meat for men", and according to Hugh of St. Victor, the reward opposite to Lust is to "become children of God"[131].

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123 Galatians 3:8.

124 Hassig, *The Mark of the Beast*, 73-74.

125 Clements (*Picta Poesis*, section IX) remarks on the fact that one of the most controversial topics in Christian history was whether or not the body would also return to life along with the soul, and how this debate was specifically allegorized by the phoenix in the Middle Ages.

126 In "The Sonnet: Ruminations on Form, Sex and History", in Hecht, *Melodies Unheard*, 62-64.

127 As mentioned in the analysis of "Pride", Hecht notes the promotion insisted upon by Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians from servants to sons of God.

128 The image appears in Herbert, as one instance, in "The Bunch of Grapes" in *The Works of George Herbert,* ed. Francis E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 128. Another example cited by the poet himself, "Barnfloor and Winepress"by G.M. Hopkins, mentions the word "vintage" with a similar effect ("The wine was rackèd from the press;/Now in our altar-vessels stored/Is the sweet vintage of our Lord"). In "On Hopkins' The Wreck of the Deutschland", in Hecht, *Melodies Unheard*, 113.

129 Pelicans were known for plucking their flesh to feed their younglings (this is also noticed by Hecht in "Public and Private art" in *On the Laws of the Poetic Art*, 113).

130 "The Pellican, for to revive her younge,/Doth peirce her brest, and geve them of her blood:/Then searche your breste, and as yow have with tonge,/With penne proceede to doe our countrie good:/Your zeale is great, your learning is profunde, /Then helpe our wantes, with that you doe abounde".

131 Sweeney, *Sin in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 106.

The image of Christ as mother is also repeatedly employed, with a different meaning, by Julian of Norwich. She was one of the most prominent English mystics and she lived between the 14th and 15th centuries, an anchoress secluded in Norwich cathedral. After falling severely ill around the age of thirty, she experienced a series of visions of Christ bleeding, and was miraculously saved. She wrote about this epiphany in some celebrated texts, but what seems most remarkable is the connection of the son of God with motherhood: "The Second Person of the Trinity is our mother in nature, in our substantial making. In him we are grounded and rooted, and he is our mother by mercy in our sensuality, by taking flesh. […] A mother can give her child milk to suck, but our precious mother, Jesus, can feed us with himself."[132].

The salvation provided by Christ, which should be spiritual, therefore has a long tradition in its physical elaboration as concrete nourishment from one body to the other. This sensuality takes on almost outrageous terms, in line with the Baroque taste for the grotesque, in an epigram by Crashaw "Blessed be the paps which Thou hast sucked"[133], titled after a passage in Luke 11 and closest to Hecht's in its exaggerated physicality:

> Supposed he had been Tabled at thy Teates
> Thy hunger feeles not what he eates:
> Hee'l have his Teat e're long (a bloody one)
> The Mother then must suck the Son.

The conceit here, less contracted than in Hecht, shows the paradox of the Child being suckled by Mary who will in turn be suckled with his blood. Milk and blood, son and mother, are opposed and recur circularly, and the spiritual message of the text cannot free itself from its sexual allusions. A very similar image is portrayed in Herbert's more austere poetry, specifically in "Longing"[134], showing how such extreme identification of body and spirit was devoid of shame for the mentality of the time: "From thee all pitie flows./ Mothers are kinde, because thou art,/And dost dispose/ To them a part:/Their infants, them; and they suck thee/More free". Making Christ a mother stresses his sexless (or sex-saturated, given the physical details implied) nature and makes his absence the more real and anguishing. Herbert, in fact, adds: "Bowels of pitie, hear!/Lord of my soul, love of my minde,/Bow down thine eare!". As is often found in Hecht's emblems, the oxymoronic, failing fallacy of "Bowels of pitie", attempts the impossible task of making God's love man-sized. Similarly, the image of maternal union is connected to the concrete (at least for its time) body of the phoenix in an emblem in *Partheneia Sacra*: as Lederer notes, the author applies the emblem of the phoenix with "joined breasts", or as he says, "with a twin-like heart" to the union of the Mother and Son[135]. Bertonasco moreover associates Crashaw's epigram with two emblems – one in *Amori Divini et Humani Effectus*, in which Anima is pictured sucking the breast of Divine Love, and one by Quarles, in which a pig-faced man and a woman are pictured in front of a breast, milking it, with the motto "Ye may suck, but not to be satisfied with the breast of her consolation"[136] (Fig. 8).

With a similar duality of meaning, Julian also goes on to define Christ, like the phoenix, as "One": "[…] I am the Unity, I am the supreme Goodness of all kind of things, I am the One who makes you love, I am the One who makes you desire, I am the never-ending fulfilment of all true desires"[137]. Once again, the equation between Christian and sexual desire is made quite prominent and fulfilled in one who is both soul and body and given to us to feast upon.

Such distinction between unity of flesh and unity of spirit is contradictory when related to a spiritual creature that became incarnate and whose "body", through a simulacrum, is ritually ingested during mass. In all cases, the title "Such a One" remarks on the divine quality of Christ, not only on his unity. A simple man, by comparison, lacks both attributes, and is reduced to mere "other". It is interesting to notice that both "Lust" and "Gluttony" present at their basis the fundamental cycles of life –creation, decomposition– which were equally a preoccupation of Metaphysical poets and reveal the concrete origins of emblem writing, a practice born in response to the phenomena of experienced life.

As the same state of incompleteness was felt as a curse by many religious poets in the sixteenth century, many authors, according to Hecht's explanation, began to represent God as a lover, in physical terms. Donne was one of the first who "wrote about incarnating the spirit in the act of sexual union, mimicking the incarnation of God onto Christ"[138]. This is evident especially in his "Holy Sonnet XIV: Batter my heart", where he asks God to physically overpower him ("you ravish me") and to love him, "divorcing" him from the Devil who keeps him in his hold. The hope, once again, is for a reunion ("take me to you, imprison me") expressed in physical terms. Being "other", men and poets can only be content with a continuous yearning, and with the perspective of an indirect interaction with God, never reaching a state of equality with him – not even, ironically, with his incarnation. If Christ can contain both the spiritual characteristics of man and woman, son (brother to humanity) and mother and, simultaneously, remain pure and celibate, he is a rare exception, just like the miraculous bird here associated with his person. Man cannot possibly follow his example, and ends up as either sexually frustrated or sexually obsessed, never able to synthesize or balance extremes but rather internally divided.

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132 Julian of Norwich, *Sixteen Revelations of Divine Love*, ed. R.F.S Cressy (London: S. Clarke, 1843), 146.

133 Richard Crashaw, *The Complete Works of Richard Crashaw*, ed. Alexander Balloch Grosart (London: Robson and Sons, 1872), II: 101.

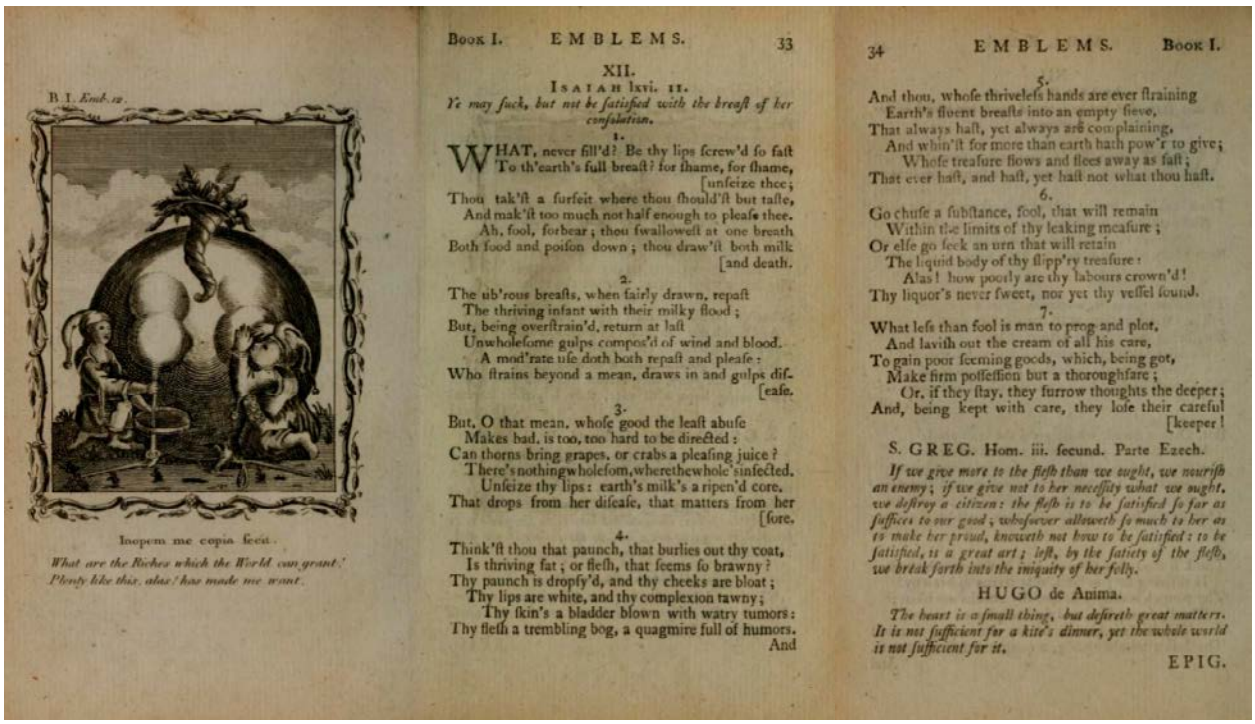
134 George Herbert, "Longing", in *The Works of George Herbert,* ed. Francis E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 148-150.

135 Lederer, "John Donne and the Emblematic Practice", 192.

136 Marc Bertonasco, *Crashaw and the Baroque* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1971), 32.

137 Julian of Norwich, *Sixteen Revelations*, 147.

138 In "The Sonnet: Ruminations on Form, Sex and History", in Hecht, *Melodies Unheard*, 63. The poem appears in *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, 553-555.



B. I. Emb. xx.

Inopem me copia fecit.

What are the Riches which the World can grant!
Plenty like this, alas! has made me want.

Book I. EMBLEMS. 33

XII.

Isaiah lxvi. 11.

Ye may suck, but not be satisfied with the breast of her consolation.

1.

WHAT, never fill'd? Be thy lips screw'd so fast
To th'earth's full breast? for shame, for shame,
[unseize thee;
Thou tak'st a forfeit where thou should'st but taste,
And mak'st too much not half enough to please thee.
Ah, fool, forbear; thou swallowest at one breath
Both food and poison down; thou draw'st both milk
[and death.

2.

The ub'rous breasts, when fairly drawn, repast
The thriving infant with their milky flood;
But, being overstrain'd, return at last
Unwholesome gulps compos'd of wind and blood.
A mod'rate use doth both repast and please:
Who strains beyond a mean, draws in and gulps dis-
[ease.

3.

But, O that mean, whose good the least abuse
Makes bad, is too, too hard to be directed:
Can thorns bring grapes, or crabs a pleasing juice?
There's nothing wholesom, where the whole's infected.
Unseize thy lips: earth's milk's a ripen'd core,
That drops from her disease, that matters from her
[sore.

4.

Think'st thou that paunch, that burlies out thy coat,
Is thriving fat; or flesh, that seems so brawny?
Thy paunch is dropsy'd, and thy cheeks are bloat;
Thy lips are white, and thy complexion tawny;
Thy skin's a bladder blown with watry tumors:
Thy flesh a trembling bog, a quagmire full of humors.
And

34 EMBLEMS. Book I.

5.

And thou, whose thriveless hands are ever straining
Earth's fluent breasts into an empty sieve,
That always hast, yet always are complaining,
And whin'st for more than earth hath pow'r to give;
Whose treasure flows and flees away as fast;
That ever hast, and hast, yet hast not what thou hast.

6.

Go chuse a substance, fool, that will remain
Within the limits of thy leaking measure;
Or else go seek an urn that will retain
The liquid body of thy slipp'ry treasure:
Alas! how poorly are thy labours crown'd!
Thy liquor's never sweet, nor yet thy vessel sound.

7.

What less than fool is man to prog and plot,
And lavish out the cream of all his care,
To gain poor seeming goods, which, being got,
Make firm possession but a thoroughfare;
Or, if they stay, they furrow thoughts the deeper;
And, being kept with care, they lose their careful
[keeper!

S. GREG. Hom. iii. secund. Parte Ezech.

If we give more to the flesh than we ought, we nourish an enemy; if we give not to her necessity what we ought, we destroy a citizen: the flesh is to be satisfied so far as suffices to our good; whosoever alloweth so much to her as to make her proud, knoweth not how to be satisfied: to be satisfied, is a great art; lest, by the satiety of the flesh, we break forth into the iniquity of her folly.

HUGO de Anima.

The heart is a small thing, but desireth great matters. It is not sufficient for a kite's dinner, yet the whole world is not sufficient for it.

EPIG.

Figure 8. "Emblem XII" [139]. *Inopem me copia fecit*. "What are the Riches which the World can grant!/Plenty like this, alas" has made me want", in Quarles, Francis. *Emblems, divine and moral*: *together with the hieroglyphics of man.* London: Alex Hogg, 1790, 33-34, as mentioned in Bertonasco, *Crashaw and the Baroque*, 32. Source: Archive.org. Accessed February 17, 2022. https://archive.org/details/quarlesemblemsdi00quar/page/n59/mode/2up

5. Conclusions

Overall, these emblems engage with the tradition from which they originate, and develop theoretically and artistically some of the ideals which stood originally behind the form: the notion that natural objects had a symbolic meaning, and, most importantly, that even the incorporeal and spiritual could not completely transcend the felt experience of corporality. This concept acquired new meaning as the world was emerging from the traumatic experiences brought by two World Wars and the Holocaust, times of extreme violence in which the levels of hardship and misery did not seem very distant from those of past dark ages, and during which God seemed more distant than ever. The gloomy parables illustrated in the sequence, developing out of and countering their earlier Christian sentiments and usage, find parallels throughout the rest of the book which contains the emblems on the sins, *The Hard Hours*. This second and more mature book of poems is rich in biblical images and characters (found in poems like "Ostia Antica" or "The Man who Married Magdalene"), historical events and reminiscences (as in "Behold the Lilies in the Field" and, significantly, "Rites and Ceremonies") and animal metaphors ("The Song of The Flea", "Giant Tortoise"), tracing the premises for a reflection on the relation between religion, history and culture. These themes will remain at the core of Hecht's work throughout his career, and they unavodably lead him, as in the case of *The Seven Deadly Sins*, to reflect on the ways in which morality and humanity can be bent or corrupted by violence. Poem after poem, the author wishes to reiterate the importance of human compassion and reflection, as well as the personal and collective responsibility to defend human dignity, beyond any form of ideology.

By showing how concrete issues inform, historically, all forms of cultural expression, from the most refined or

[139] Isaiah LXVI: "Ye may suck, but not be satisfied with the breast of her consolation". "What, never fill'd? By thy lips screw'd so fast/To th'earth full breast? for shame, for shame, unseize thee;/Thou tak'st a forfeit where thou should'st but taste,/And mak'st too much not half enough to please thee./Ah, fool, forbear; thou swallowest at one breath/Both food and poison down; thou draw'st both milk and death./The ub'rous breasts, when fairly drawn, repast/The thriving infant with their milky flood;/But, being overstrain'd, return at last/Unwholesome gulps compos'd of wind and blood./A mod'rate use doth both repast and please:/Who strains beyonf a mean, draws in and gulps disease./But, O that mean, whose good the least abuse/Makes bad, is too, too hard to be directed:/Can thorns bring grapes, or crabs a pleasing juice?/There's nothing wholesome, where the whole's infected./Unseize thy lips: earth's milk's a ripen'd core,/That drops from her disease, that matters from her sore. /Think thou that pounch, that burlies out thy coat,/Is thriving fat; or flesh, that seems so brawny?/Thy paunch is dropsy'd, and thy cheeks are bloat;/Thy lips are white, and thy complexion tawny;/Thy skin's a bladder blown with watry tumors:/Thy flesh a trembling bog, a quagmire full of humours./And thou, whose thriveless hands are ever straining/Earth's fluent breasts into an empty sieve,/That always hast, yet always are complaining, And whin'st for more than earth hath pow'r to give/Whose treasureflow and flees away as fast;/That ever hast, and hast, yet hast not what thou hast./Go chuse a substance, fool, that will remain/Within the limits of thy leaking measure;/Or else go seek an urn that will retain/The liquid body of thy slipp'ry treasure:/Alas! how poorly are thy labours crown'd!/Thy liquor's never sweet, nor yet thy vessel sound./What less than fool is man to prog and plot,/And lavish out the cream of all his care,/To gain poor seeming goods, which, being got,/Make firm possession but a thoroughfare;/Or, if they stay, they furrow thoughts the deeper;/And, being kept with care, they lose their careful keeper!".

ancient to the most popular, he invites the reader to observe how ingrained these are in everyday life, and how profoundly they impact the consciousness of the individual and the dynamics of the society he is part of. This effort is strongly supported by the enigmatic and yet striking images created by Baskin, an artist capable of bringing to the surface of the enervated bodies and expressive faces he creates the intimate sorrows and feelings of his characters, making both body and soul visible and complementary, in a visual synthesis. As he invites the observer to decipher the subtle hints in his drawings, not devoid of irony, he works along with Hecht to provoke in the readers and viewers extensive reflection on the chosen moral subject. The power of the image to contain and express the ineffable remains the only certainty, and it is given even more value by the effort to create an iconic language that could translate the visual image, in a continuous attempt at clarification. Image and words here are important in the range of references they entail, in their capability to evoke and contain multiple meanings and to represent entire cultures, but most importantly they matter as forms: through the limitations they impose, the modern poet and artist can challenge the mind to accommodate antithetical values within one space, to get closer and closer to a synthesis, in a time of extreme doubt and traumatic change.

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