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March 1998

Review of *Emblems and Alchemy*, by Alison Adams & Stanton J. Linden, eds.

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Ganim, Russell J., "Review of *Emblems and Alchemy*, by Alison Adams & Stanton J. Linden, eds." (1998).
French Language and Literature Papers. 9.

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Alison Adams, and Stanton J. Linden, (eds.) *Emblems and Alchemy*. Glasgow: Glasgow Emblem Studies, 1998. Pp. 215. Paper.

Combining revived interest in both the emblem and alchemy, this volume is the third in a series of works on emblem studies published by the French Department at the University of Glasgow. Its ten essays, divided among three major categories entitled, “A Theoretical Perspectives”, “The English Alchemists”, and “Continental Manifestations”, stress inter disciplinaryity as they explore the relationships between text, image, and alchemical practice. Broad in scope but detailed in its analyses, the compendium raises several intriguing questions about the correspondence between literature, art, and pseudo-science. Despite the diversity of its topics, the collection is often surprisingly unified in its discussion of authors, motifs, and themes. With the exception of some gaps in argumentation, *Emblems and Alchemy* makes a significant contribution not only to the field of emblematics, but to early modern studies.

The theoretical section begins with Bernhard F. Scholz’s explanation of Goossen van Vreeswijck’s adaptation (indeed alteration) of Jacob Cats’s emblems in his treatises on metallurgy and alchemy. Conceptualizing the emblem in terms of its “signifying capacity”, (5), as opposed to a literary genre, Scholz claims that van Vreeswijck does not give a direct answer to why he adds alchemical signs such as the moon, stars, and Saturn to Cats’s emblems. Rather, Scholz proposes that the alchemical symbols constitute interpretations “of the book of nature” (9), and “inscribe the alchemist’s processes and procedures into nature and myth” (22), thereby lending legitimacy to the alchemist’s work. Moreover, Scholz suggests that van Vreeswijck’s additions to Cats’s emblems stem from the *ars memoriae* tradition of affixing mnemonic devices on widely viewed texts. These arguments are entirely plausible, and Scholz sheds much light on the issue. Yet, Scholz himself mentions that the tripartite structure of motto, picture, and epigram are absent in van Vreeswijck, as is the “exegetic and didactic thrust of the emblem proper” (22). Though Scholz’s prior analysis partially explains this absence, the essay would have benefited from a more explicit interpretation of how the form and purpose of van Vreeswijck’s project requires him to bypass these basic elements of the emblem in his adaptation of Cats.

M.E. Warlick's article, "The Domestic Alchemist," discusses gender issues as they relate to the depiction of women in alchemical emblems. Relying on the images created by Matthaeus Merian to accompany Michael Maier's *Atalanta fugiens* (1617) as a point of departure, Warlick argues that while "cosmic, misogynist overtones" (46), generally did not appear in alchemical emblems, these works nonetheless showed a social regression precipitated by the Protestant Reformation. Specifically, "domestic activities" such as "cooking and washing" were "essential to the development of alchemy," but their "female practitioners would appear only at the periphery" (47). Warlick's article is convincing and draws a number of excellent parallels between various emblematic works published in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. If the article were to be enhanced, however, one could imagine a more detailed explanation of the general theory and function of alchemical emblems, and how these overall constructs were appropriated and changed in alchemical emblems with a domestic theme.

In György E. Szonyi's "Architectural Symbolism and Fantasy Landscapes in Alchemical and Occult Discourse: Revelatory Images," the focus changes from the domestic to the fantastic. This informative article deals with "occult iconography" (49) within the framework of emblematic representations of cosmic and theosophic contents," as well as emblems that depict "alchemical allegories" (57). The focus is on the former, as Szonyi suggests that the architectural elements in occult symbolism, i.e., temples, gardens, labyrinths, etc..., produce a nexus of the sacred and the profane. Among the most interesting points in the article is the idea that architectural constructs, because of their metaphorical nature, function in the manner of mandalas in that they act as a conduit between the reader and the deity. Szonyi's reasoning is well developed, but the author makes reference to a number of images not pictured in the essay. As a result, the reader is at times a bit disoriented trying to locate an emblem which does not appear in the text.

The section on English Alchemists opens with Linden's "The Ripley Scrolls and *The Compound of Alchymy*." Linden's is a compelling article that examines the intertextual relationship between George Ripley's late fifteenth-century *Compound*, and what is known as the "Ripley scrolls," which Linden describes as "a family of at least twenty fifteenth-, sixteenth, and seventeenth-century alchemical manuscripts [in the form of images], the majority of which...have been linked to George Ripley" (74). Linden persuasively argues that the *Compound* "provide[s] invaluable insights into the problematical symbols and allegory" (86) that appear in the scrolls. Of particular interest is Linden's discussion of transmutation and

the *opus alchymicum* in general. Linden rightly points out that his study overlooks some important pictorial motifs and does not give a deep analysis of the Latin inscriptions and their relationship to the illustrations. But in an overall sense, this article gives a solid point of departure from which to continue study of Ripley's work. The *opus alchymicum* is a theme important to Lyndy Abraham's article, "Edward Kelly's Hieroglyph." In large measure, this essay deals with Kelly's collaboration with the sixteenth-century patron and alchemist John Dee. Abraham gives important biographical information on both men, then fixes attention on Kelly's treatise, *Theatro Astronomiae Terrestri*, which "consists of thirteen chapters outlining the process of the *opus alchymicum* with sixteen woodcut emblems" (97). Discussing both the materiality and spirituality of alchemical emblems, Abraham stresses the meditative aspects of emblematic representation when dealing with text-image interaction in Kelly's work. Abraham then concludes with a brief, but provocative analysis of how certain aspects of Kelly's iconography respond to Dee's *Monas hieroglyphica* (1564).

Dee's work is the subject of Stephen Clucas's "Non est legendum sed inspiciendum solum": Inspectival Knowledge and the Visual Logic of John Dee's *Liber Mysteriorum*." Clucas states that his purpose is to "outline the visual components of Dee's angelic conversations (magical characters, tables, or 'seals,' and visionary iconography)" (109), with respect to Dee's sense of "spiritual intelligence" (112). Much of the article centers on Dee's accounts of "contact" with angels and other spiritual entities, and Clucas persuasively shows how Dee's epistemology relies on Medieval concepts of the *ars notoria*, as well as Augustine's exhortation "to 'see' the *visibilia* of scriptural narratives," (126). This process of "deciphering visionary descriptions" (127), relates to the concept of "inspectival knowledge" which aims to decode the meaning of the "unseen" (112). Clucas's article, unlike the previous essay, makes little attempt to discuss the direct relationship between Dee's work and alchemy. But this possible disadvantage is compensated by Clucas's sharp understanding of how Dee's "prophetic discourse" (131), integrates emblematic and heraldic traditions.

Peggy Muñoz Simonds deals with alchemy in a more overt manner in "Love is a spirit all compact of fire' Alchemical *Coniunctio* in *Venus and Adonis*." Her essay makes a strong case for the influence of alchemical language, motifs, and processes in Shakespeare's 1593 poem commissioned for the Earl of Southampton. The article is particularly informative with respect to the Ovidian sources of Shakespeare's allusions to alchemy, as well as to the medical uses of alchemy

which, along with the transmutation of base metals into gold, was the pseudo-science's primary function. Simonds draws effective parallels between Shakespeare's poem and the alchemical texts of Maier and Elias Ashmole, and gives precise textual analyses which draw interesting comparisons between "sexual conjunctions" and "chemical weddings" (143). If there is one quibble, it is that Simonds does refer more than once to Shakespeare's poem as a "broad comedy of sensuality," (156), without elaborating on her definition of "comedy," or its relation to alchemy.

In the final essay on the English alchemists, the reader passes from Shakespeare to Milton. Paul Cheshire's article, "Milton's Use of Lunar Imagery in *Paradise Lost*," centers not so much on alchemical imagery in Milton (which, he states, is a topic that has received significant attention), but on the ways in which the moon represents "the relationship between God [sic] and evil" (157) in Milton's text. Basing part of his work on alchemical emblematisers and/or thinkers such as Maier, Robert Fludd, and Thomas Vaughan, Cheshire makes interesting observations about gender issues as they relate to Renaissance perceptions of the moon, and to the acts of "miscreation" (165) that Milton's Satan perpetrates. The article is convincing and informative, but a bit brief considering the choice of text and theme. One would have enjoyed, for example, a more detailed discussion of Milton's use of the eclipse motif, as well as additional analysis of how the sun both complements and contradicts the moon's role in representing evil in the universe.

The volume's final section begins with Ilana Zinguer's "Les frontispices emblématiques: intentions de Bérolde de Verville." Zinguer examines two presumed "alchemical" frontispices, the first to the *Tableau des Riches Inventions*, and the second to the *Voyage des Princes Fortunez*, both published at the beginning of the seventeenth century. While the frontispices were the work of Léonard Gaultier, Zinguer argues that they owe much of their style and content to Bérolde, who was also an accomplished goldsmith. She contends that the frontispiece, as well as the text of the *Tableau* are based on Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, while the *Voyage* reflects the popularity of the technique of anamorphosis at that time. Zinguer alludes to these notions throughout the essay, but is primarily concerned with how the frontispiece of the *Tableau* relates to the text itself. Of particular interest are her descriptions of the way in which alchemical themes and motifs in the frontispiece such as the blending of mercury and sulfur, are expressed in the text. The *Voyage*, by contrast, is more "romanesque"

(182) in its approach, and highlights the main phases of the alchemical process: separation, mortification, and conjunction. Zinguer's style is quite clear and her arguments persuasive. While much of the historical and literary contextualization of Béroalde's œuvre comes rather surprisingly at the end of her essay, Zinguer effectively brings to light the circumstances in which Béroalde produced his work.

Closing the compendium is Susan Sirc's analysis of the alchemical elements in Goethe's novel, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (Elective Affinities, 1809). According to Sirc, recent criticism has dealt with the alchemical context of Goethe's novel, but has not sufficiently explored the influence of alchemical illustrations on Goethe. The strongest part of the essay is the first two-thirds, where Sirc, building on her previous work, discusses the ways in which Goethe borrows from Comenius's *Orbis Pictus*, Andreae's *Chymische Hochzeit*, Daniel Stolcius's *Chymisches Lustgärtlein*, and Fludd's *Utriusque Comsi Historia* to shape the plot and characters of his novel. Sirc also does a fine job of interpreting Goethe's use of *ekphrasis*, and in describing the way in which the alchemical process is represented as a metaphor for divine creation. Somewhat less convincing is the final third of the essay which suggests semiotic and thematic links between *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* a number of per-formative *tableaux vivants*, i.e., engravings based on paintings by Van Dyck, Poussin, and Terborch. Nonetheless, Sirc's argument provides a fresh perspective and furnishes much useful material.

In sum, the essays that make up this volume give considerable insight into questions concerning alchemy and the early modern emblem. The level of research, as well as the scope of the study, command our immediate attention and respect.

Russell Ganim