

# Learned Love

Proceedings of the Emblem Project Utrecht Conference on  
Dutch Love Emblems and the Internet (November 2006)

Edited by  
Els Stronks and Peter Boot,  
assisted by  
Dagmar Stiebral

DANS Symposium Publications 1  
The Hague, 2007

# Contents

The Dutch love emblem on the Internet: an introduction –  
Els Stronks and Peter Boot 1

## PART 1 THE DUTCH LOVE EMBLEM

Creator of the earliest collection of love emblems? – Alison Saunders 13  
Commonplaces of Catholic love – Arnoud Visser 33  
Encoding the emblematic tradition of love – Marc van Vaeck 49  
Churches as indicators of a larger phenomenon – Els Stronks 73  
The Spanish epigrams in Vaenius's *Amoris divini emblemata* – Sagrario López Poza 93  
Love emblems and a web of intertextuality – Jan Bloemendal 111  
The *Ambacht van Cupido* from 1615 in Wrocław (Poland) –  
Stefan Kiedron and Joanna Skubisz 119  
Investing in your relationship – Arie Jan Gelderblom 131  
The love emblem applied – Peter Boot 143

## PART 2 THE DIGITISATION OF THE EMBLEM

The Emblem Project Utrecht as a knowledge site – Els Stronks 151  
Traditional editorial standards and the digital edition – Edward Vanhoutte 157  
The technical backbone of the Emblem Project Utrecht – Johan Tilstra 175  
Digitising Dutch love emblems – Peter M. Daly 183  
Setting the emblem schema to work – Thomas Stäcker 201  
Mesotext. Framing and exploring annotations – Peter Boot 211

Colour plates

## Investing in your relationship

---

Arie Jan Gelderblom, Utrecht University

At first sight the title of this contribution, *Investing in your relationship*, does not seem to connect to the first decades of the seventeenth century, the golden age of the Dutch love emblem. It seems more appropriate for modern brochures on the improvement of a couple's emotional life, or for TV programmes concerned with marriage counselling. Nevertheless, I hope to demonstrate that it is a suitable heading for a discussion of love emblems. As an emblematiser, I have long been interested in the sudden rise of amorous content matter in Low Countries emblems around and just after 1600. As a user of the EPU site (<http://emblems.let.uu.nl>), I tried to satisfy this curiosity by launching a set of queries that might bring forward relevant material. In what follows, I will assemble my findings into a hypothesis on the popularity of the Dutch love emblem. Moreover, I am going to pay attention to a distinct subtext in the material I studied.

Why was there a sudden boom in amorous emblematics in the Netherlands at the beginning of the seventeenth century? In informative chapters on the EPU site, three explanations are given.<sup>1</sup> Firstly, Dutch society, which had recently become protestant, needed new and modern instructions for the communication between the sexes, especially regarding marriage. Calvinism had introduced a rather rational concept of matrimony, and traditional Roman-Catholic didactics in this field were no longer adequate. Secondly, Dutch poets and engravers wanted to demonstrate that they too belonged to the refined European culture that celebrated love as the cause of elegance. Not bothered by Freud's ideas on repression, they considered Eros the creator of true civilisation. Freud's critic Herbert Marcuse (*Eros and Civilisation*, 1955) would probably have agreed. Thirdly, the jolly amusement of love emblems was a welcome form of recreation that could relieve the generally felt political and military strain of the war against Spain.

In line with the common European celebration of love that owed so much to Petrarch, Dutch love emblems feature well known Petrarchist motifs, e.g. the cold demeanour of the lady or the vicissitudes of a young man who has fallen in love (Porteman in Hooft 1983, 23). He experiences that his desire is growing by separation whenever his beloved coldly denies access, or that he is spending all his energy by running around in circles, without getting any nearer to her. Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft's *Emblemata amatoria* (1611) contains telling examples: Emblems XXIII (*Frigida accendit*: She kindles by being cold) (Fig. 1), XXI (*Eadem cantilena*: The same old song) (Fig. 2) and XXVII (*Carcer voluntarius*: A voluntary jail) (Fig. 3) elaborate on female distance and the pains of the young man.

---

1 [http://emblems.let.uu.nl/emblems/educational/toetsedu003\\_01.php](http://emblems.let.uu.nl/emblems/educational/toetsedu003_01.php)

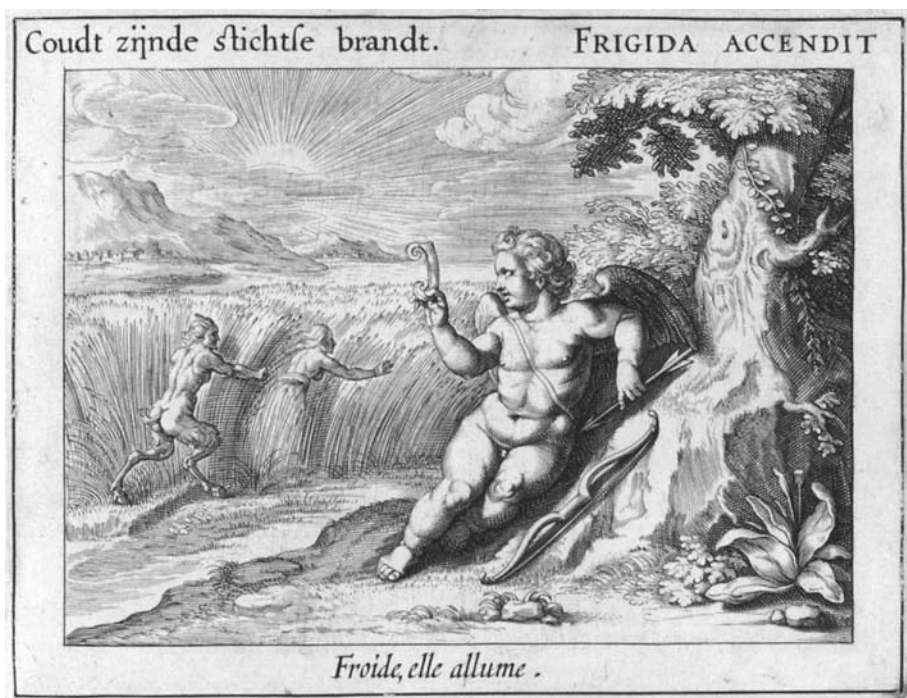


Fig. 1: P.C. Hooft, *Emblemata amatoria*, emblem 23 (EPU site)

The title of Daniël Heinsius's *Quaeris quid sit amor?* (1601) suggests this initial ignorance by asking a question: Do you want to know what love is? As a question, it refers to the dialectical situation that was standard in early modern education. The communication between teacher and pupil normally followed the pattern of questions and answers, both in classroom reality and in printed textbooks. Consequently, Heinsius's emblem book sets out to *teach*, as the subtitle seems to corroborate: 'Do you want to know what love is, what it is to love, and what it is to follow Cupid and his encampments? Read this book and you will be learned (*doctus*).'<sup>2</sup> Heinsius thus teaches the science of love. Although *Quaeris*'s engraved title shows Cupid pointing his arrow at a young woman, Heinsius and many other emblematasts seem to address the emotional conditions of young *men* in particular. Thus it seems not too far-fetched to suppose that the amorous information in their emblem books was sought as a guideline for young men who were falling in love.

We should not forget the practical circumstances of place, time and person. Until the middle of the sixteenth century, life in the commercial towns of the Netherlands was rather secluded and self-centered. There surely were networks of national and international transportation, but in general the outside world was

<sup>2</sup> <http://emblems.let.uu.nl/he1601front1.html>



Fig. 2: P.C. Hooft, *Emblemata amatoria*, emblem 21 (EPU site)



Fig. 3: P.C. Hooft, *Emblemata amatoria*, emblem 27 (EPU site)

far away. Within the communities, the merchant class prevailed. In their families, marriages were often arranged, so that local harmony could flourish and preservation and maybe growth of the family assets were guaranteed. A young couple probably had a say in its own future, but long term family interests weighed heavily. By 1600, the situation had changed. Family interests were as important as ever, but local isolation was rapidly vanishing: the world had suddenly opened up. Not only by the convulsions of the Spanish war and the huge influx of immigrants, but also by the beginnings of the country's colonial expansion. Moreover, now that wealth was on the rise, young men went away from home for longer periods, studying at universities or travelling south on a Grand Tour (Frank-van Westrienen 1976). No longer in their parents' immediate surroundings, meeting new and often exciting people, how were they to control their emotions if they were hit by Cupid's arrow? The poet and emblemist Hooft (born 1581) offers a fine example of this quandary. In 1599, on Grand Tour in Italy, he stays in Venice for a few months and meets a Flemish merchant's family. Later on, when the young traveller is in Rome, he receives a letter from their daughter Isabelle, regretting that her plans to follow him have failed. She is very much looking forward to his second visit to Venice 'when we will make the decisions that will please you'. Circumstantial evidence suggests that his hopeful return to Venice in 1601 turned into a deception when on second thoughts Isabelle rejected him. In distress, Hooft wrote a sad poem on his loneliness, but – a proof of his deep-felt emotions – he never destroyed Isabelle's love letter. It still exists and is now in the collections of the Royal Academy of Sciences, Amsterdam (Hooft 1976, 65-69).

This little story can serve as a real life background to love emblems. To venture a hypothesis by way of a fourth explanation: love emblems were so popular because they addressed the things young people actually felt and experienced. Emblems taught youngsters what falling in love meant and which stages there were in the development of an emotional relationship; they also brought comfort by explaining the transience of sadness. How unpleasant the experience and how bitter the rejection might be, these were Cupid's common attacks on all human beings. On the other hand the prospects of a happy, harmonious relationship were never far away. It is not difficult to see the ultimate goal of these teachings: the awareness of Cupid's whims and the creation of a stable mind, which should not too easily become depressed or elated. The thing called love exerted a huge fascination, but it was potentially dangerous for young people, especially when they were away from home and could not seek immediate advice from their relatives. Only in equanimity young men (and women?) would be able to make the right choice. Uninformed, their love was unsafe. They might become disheartened by misfortune, or jump to rash conclusions when meeting good luck. In both cases this could lead to the wrong choice of a partner. Seen from an economic point of view, a wrong choice could easily endanger their finances and in the worst case even the prosperity of whole families.

The use of love emblem books, as Karel Porteman has pointed out, was to be found in circles of the young and wealthy (Porteman in Hooft 1983, 25-29). The beautifully printed and sometimes sumptuously bound little volumes served privately as gifts to a beloved and socially as conversation pieces. One of their important functions, and that of the amorous discussions they were intended to provoke, can now be seen in close connection with these amorous, social and economic teachings. Inspired by Judith Butler's terminology (Butler 1987), I tend to see them as serving *the organisation of desire*. Love, lust, desire, disappointment are not just individual experiences. On the contrary, they fit into a time-honoured format of amorous discourse and can thus be *managed*. Thus the individual is supported in organizing his/her emotions along socially accepted lines.

I surmise that those who could commission, buy and read these emblem books, and discuss and practice their contents, must have had the leisure to do so. They must have had ample time and money at their command. I therefore decided to run a series of queries in the EPU site to find out more. Besides, I was inspired by Bernhard Scholz's readings of *Sinnepoppen* by Roemer Visscher (1614). Scholz discovered an economic subtext in Visscher's emblems, and a strong tendency towards rational social behaviour (Scholz 1985 and 1990). I was curious if this would apply to love emblems as well, and thus I let the EPU search engine explore the semantic fields of *time* (time, clock, hour, hourglass) and *money* (money, pecunia, purse, profit, fortune) in the emblem books on the site.

Evidently, not all emblem books on the site yielded results, and if they did, some were more prolific than others. Nevertheless, the harvest was richer than I expected. For *time*, apart from well-known *topoi* like 'time flies' or 'nothing escapes destruction by time' (Hooft, *Emblemata amatoria*, 'Van't leven comt de doot') (Fig. 4), love emblems also teach their users not to waste one's time on trifles and keep



Fig. 4: P.C. Hooft, *Emblemata amatoria*, emblem 30 (EPU site)



Fig. 5: J. Cats, *Sinne- en minnebeelden*, emblem 30 (EPU site)



Fig. 6: O. Vaenius, *Amorum emblemata*, emblem 106 (EPU site)

their goal in mind (Cats, *Sinne- en minnebeelden*, 'Fugat, non capit') (Fig. 5), to wait patiently for the right moment (O. Vaenius, *Amorum emblemata*, 'Durate' (Fig. 6)) as a rapid, heedless attack could spoil the beauty of its object in no time, and to grasp one's opportunities when time is there. As a lover in Cats's *Sinne- en minnebeelden* (1627, emblem 30) puts it, when he learns that his beloved is available: 'Then was the tyme for mee to learne, my business how to guide', for ladies tend to dislike hesitant lovers.

Curiously enough, these bits of advice can also be read within an economic code. They play a key role in early modern economies, especially staple markets like Am-



Fig. 7: anonymous, *Nieuwen Ieught Spiegel*, emblem 41 (EPU site)

sterdam. Amsterdam traders, who held European near-monopolies in products like Baltic wheat and Asian spices, specialized in purchasing commodities when supply was ample and prices were low. They would then take the goods from the market, keep them in storage and wait for scarcity, growing demand and rising rates, in order to sell at a considerable profit. Contemporary ethical discussions indicate that this practice was being frowned upon, but it remained a dominant kind of business (Spies 1990). Apparently, in commerce and in love the same guidelines applied: make profitable use of your time, wait for the right moment to gain what you desire, don't rush, but do not hesitate either when your opportunity is there.

Searching for *money* brought up more evidence than expected. Especially the anonymous *Nieuwen Ieught Spiegel* (A New Mirror of Youth, 1617) produces some rich examples of emblems that combine love and money. Emblems 41 (Fig. 7) and 42 (Fig. 8) warn against unequal love, i.e. love between partners of different generations. The subject matter was very popular at the time and was also treated on stage and in songbooks. An old man cannot seduce a young girl by offering money and showing his purse; neither can an old woman tempt a young man with her open jewel box. A moralistic reading of the theme tends to interpret it as a plea for decency and social harmony. From a point of view both medical and ethical, elderly people were supposed to have given up their sexual interests. Acting otherwise was deemed improper. Even the rich could not escape this law of nature.

Yet one could think of another analysis. One can imagine that some elderly people needed a warning against silly behaviour. But why then are these emblems



Fig. 8: anonymous, *Nieuwen Ieught Spiegel*, emblem 42 (EPU site)

addressing youngsters ('*Ieught*') in particular? Did they really need the instruction that someone of their own age was more fun? Why did they have to learn that an unfulfilling relationship could not be counterbalanced by money? The old wife's open treasure casket and the old man's purse (the typical Renaissance drawstring pouch with a stick-like handle) allude to the female and male reproductive organs and therefore to sex. There might be a very tangible background to this plea for sexual behaviour according to one's age. In reality there may indeed have been affluent older men and women (widowers, widows) on the marriage market. In spite of their riches their availability was felt as something inappropriate.

Let us apply a little conceptual twist, and look at this from an economic angle. What these emblems also show is the choice between two investments. A younger partner is recommended as a better investment. For what reason? Because only two *young* lovers (and of course love implies marriage implies sex implies procreation) will produce offspring. Elderly partners tend to be infertile. Emblematists like Heinsius (*Ambacht van Cupido*, 'Amoris semen mirabile') (Fig. 9) and poets invariably hail the productivity of wedlock. Children are necessary links in the chain of generations; only they will be able to secure and hopefully enlarge the family capital and continue the family business into the future. In this light, virility stands out as an economic asset. *Nieuwen Ieught Spiegel* 44 (*Or danse maintenant: Dance now*) shows a masked man, whose purse is being stroked by an eager woman. (Fig.10) Now that she witnesses its full quality, she gives up her initial reluctance. The sexual connotations in the image of the pouch merge the erotic and



Fig. 9: D. Heinsius, *Ambacht van Cupido*, emblem 8 (EPU site)



Fig. 10: anonymous, *Nieuwen leught Spiegel*, emblem 44 (EPU site)

economic spheres: potency equals economic potential. In general, allusions to the reproductive organs (purse, money-casket) in these emblems should not be played down as jocular allusions to the practicalities of sex and the facts of the body; instead, they may well be understood as expressions of the notion that desire is an economic category.

Love is war. The overlap of the semantic fields of lovemaking and warfare is a common feature of Western cultural discourse. Seventeenth-century Dutch love



Fig. 11: W. den Elger, *Zinne-beelden der liefde*, emblem 33 (EPU site)



Fig. 12: anonymous, *Antipathia* [...], 1628, emblem 3 (EPU site)



Fig. 13: anonymous, *Typus mundi*, emblem 9 (EPU site)



Fig. 14: J. Cats, *Proteus*, emblem 20 (EPU site)

emblems highlight another important semantic overlap: love is economy. Apart from the evidence mentioned above, one can think of a common terminology of fortune and luck (both amorous and economic) and of the need to negotiate (W. den Elger, *Zinne-beelden der liefde*, ‘De liefde ziet na geen rykdommen’) (Fig. 11). ‘Lust, honour and possessions’ belong together, as they are all temporary and transient (*Antipathia*, ‘Negotatio amoris’) (Fig. 12). Even the assertion that divine love does *not* take money into consideration, suggests the opposite on the part

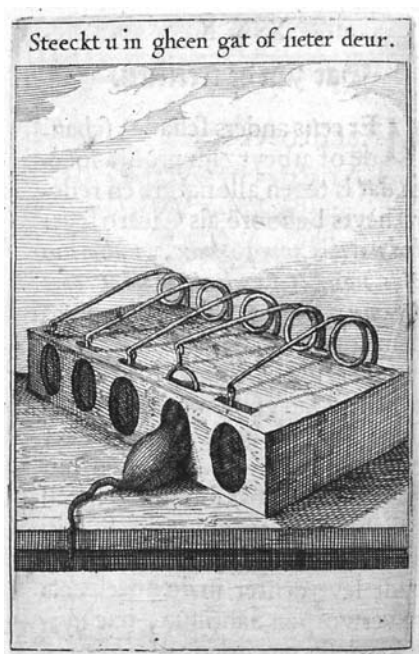


Fig. 15: R. Visscher, *Sinnepoppen 2*, emblem 31 <http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/Dutch/Renaissance/Facsimiles/VisscherSinnepoppen1614/source/96.htm>

of worldly love (*Typus mundi*, 'Frustrà: quis stabilem figat in orbe gradum?' and Cats, *Proteus*, 'Reperire, perire est') (Figs. 13 and 14). Anyone looking for Biblical support of this semantic parallel can think of Matthew VI, 21 or Luke XII, 34: 'For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also'. An Iconclass-based search in the EPU material (purse, money bag, 41D267) brings forth several specimens of the close connection between money and love.

A final example illustrates the easy crossover of images from the economic into the erotic sphere. Roemer Visscher's *Sinnepoppen 2*, XXXI (Fig. 15) shows a mouse or rat, hesitating which entry of five-hole mousetrap to take. *Motto* and *subscriptio* offer purely economic advice: 'Steeckt u in gheen gat of sieter deur': do not enter a hole when you cannot see through (Visscher 1949, 92). In other words: do not embark on any economic venture when the outcome is uncertain. In 1696, the second volume of an anonymous Dutch pornographic novel was published: *De doorluchtige daden van Jan Stront, opgedragen aan het kakhuis* (The illustrious adventures of John Sh\*t, dedicated to the sh\*thouse). In the course of the story a simpleton is taken to a brothel. In bed with a prostitute, he takes a close look at her intimate quarters; she cannot convince him, however, to do what he should do. He remains hesitant and then retorts: 'My parents taught me never to enter a hole without seeing through. Whichever way I am looking in, I cannot discern any daylight' (Anon. 2000, 96).

For a wider exploration of this conceptual field much more research needs to be done. Fortunately, digitised emblem sites with search facilities like EPU can facilitate investigations, speed up research and thus stimulate the rise of new insights. EPU helped me to observe that the amorous discourse of early seventeenth century Dutch love emblems features a strong subtext that conceptualizes love and sex in economic terms. One of their functions was to organize desire along the lines of the early modern staple market economy.

## Bibliography

- Anon. (2000) *De doorluchtige daden van Jan Stront, opgedragen aan het kakhuis*. Tweede deel. Ed. Inger Leemans. Utrecht: IJzer.
- Butler, J. (1987) *Subjects of desire. Hegelian reflections in twentieth century France*. New York: Columbia UP.
- Frank-van Westrienen, A. (1983) *De Groote Tour. Tekening van de educatiereis der Nederlanders in de zeventiende eeuw*. Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche Uitgeversmaatschappij.
- Hooft, P.C. (1976) *De briefwisseling*. Ed. H.W. van Tricht. Vol. I. Culemborg: Tjeenk Willink/Noorduijn.
- Hooft, P.C. (1983) *Emblemata amatoria [...]*. Ed. K. Porteman. Leiden: Nijhoff.
- Marcuse, H. (1955) *Eros and Civilisation*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Scholz, B.F. (1985) 'Magister artis venter: Rationalisierung der Lebenspraxis in den *Sinnepoppen* (1614) Pieter Roemer Visschers' in W. Brückner a.o. (eds.), *Literatur und Volk in 17. Jahrhundert*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 401-423.
- Scholz, B.F. (1990) 'De economische sector in Roemer Visschers *Sinnepoppen*', *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 6 (1), 17-26.
- Spies, M. (1990) 'De koopman van Rhodos. Over de schakelpunten van economie en cultuur', *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 6 (1), 166-174.
- Visscher, R. (1949) *Sinnepoppen*. Ed. L. Brummel. 's-Gravenhage: Nijhoff.