National Central University Journal of Humanities
Vol. 33, Jan 2008, pp. 85-112
College of Liberal Arts, National Central University

Interpreting Emblems, Emblems Interpreting: Love's mortal battle in Maurice Scève's *Délie*

Brooke Donaldson*

Abstract

Known primarily as the first example of love poetry in Renaissance France, Maurice Scève's *Délie* is also notable as the only work of French emblems as well as the only sixteenth-century work to incorporate emblems into an erudite work on love. The emblems have been the source of dispute among critics who agree neither on their nomenclature, on the logic behind their placement, nor on their symbolic function within the work. But the mere presence of the emblems teaches the reader *how* to approach the poetry. The *Délie*'s emblems depict the "renewed deaths" which Scève announces as the subject of his poetry and insist more emphatically upon the theme of death than do the poems. The alternation of emblems and poems reflects the poet's love experience, torn between desires of the soul and those of the body and trapped in an exorable cycle between life and death. For just as Scève's poetry combines such seemingly incompatible concepts as microcosm and macrocosm, pagan reminiscence and Christian conviction, classical allusion and medieval remnant, and Christian Platonism and artistic immortality, so too do the emblems which gloss the poems present an interpretation of those poems which contradicts or at the very least reinterprets the conclusions presented by the poet. Thus, Scève's multi-media (pictorial/verbal) presentation of death as polysemous is paradigmatic of the tensions so characteristic of his poetry and

---

* Assistant Professor of French, University of Mary Washington
Received October 4, 2007; accepted December 18, 2007; last revised January 14, 2008.

of sixteenth-century literature in general. The poems and emblems may stand on their own, but the juxtaposition of their varied interpretations reveals how Scève combines mutually exclusive characterizations of death in a unified if antithetical presentation of Petrarchan oxymoronic love.

Keywords: Maurice Scève, *Délie*, Emblems

中央大學人文學報　第三十三期
2008 年 1 月　　　　頁 85-112
中央大學文學院

Interpreting Emblems, Emblems Interpreting: Love's mortal battle in Maurice Scève's *Délie*

Brooke Donaldson

摘　要

莫理司・賽佛的《黛麗》是法國文藝復興愛情詩最早例子。此部作品同時也以唯一的法文圖詩（emblems）與唯一能將圖像（emblems）融入博學愛情詩此兩特點所著稱。在批評家之間，圖文詩是充滿爭議，大家既無法同意正確名稱，亦無法點出其圖像配置背後的邏輯，也不能講定其在作品中的象徵意義。但是只要圖像在詩中出現，即已警醒讀者要*如何*閱讀詩歌。《黛麗》圖像描繪賽佛所宣示為詩歌主題的「死亡循環」同時以比詩歌本身更為強烈戲劇性方式強調死亡主題。詩文與圖像的交替出現，反映詩人的愛情經驗，在靈魂與軀體之慾望之間拉扯，深陷生命與死亡的輪迴之中。就如同賽佛的詩結合似乎無法相匹配的概念，如大宇宙與小宇宙，異教記憶與基督現念，古典典故與中世紀餘念，基督化柏拉圖主義與藝術的不朽，同樣地，他用以闡釋詩文的圖像亦是展示出對這些詩的詮釋，而這些詮釋，反駁或至少重讀詩人所提出的結論。所以，賽佛的多媒體（圖像／文字）死亡的複義（polysemous）展示，是他詩作典型張力，也是普遍 16 世紀文學的代表。詩文與圖像可以獨立，但是兩者多變詮釋的並出更顯出賽佛是如何結合對死亡相互排斥的描述，成為一個雖對立但統合的佩脫拉克矛盾愛情的體現。

關鍵字：莫理司・賽佛、《黛麗》、圖詩（圖像）

Known primarily as the first example of love poetry in Renaissance France, Maurice Scève's *Délie* (1544) is also notable as the only work of French emblems as well as the only sixteenth-century work to incorporate emblems into an erudite work on love. Interpreting the emblems has been the preoccupation of many critics over the past seventy years, as well as a source of much dispute, for they can agree neither on the emblem's nomenclature (emblem or *imprese*), on the logic behind their placement, nor on their symbolic function within the work. No one, in fact, knows whether the emblems were designed specifically for the work or even if Scève chose them himself.

Critics tend to fall into one of two groups: those who believe in the centrality of the emblems and Scève's influence in their selection, and those who believe the emblems to be merely an addition made by the printer to make the volume more visually attractive and sellable. But in interpreting the emblems, the critics have missed the essential—the fact that the emblems themselves are interpreting the poems. Indeed, the mere presence of the emblems teaches the reader *how* to approach the poetry. Together the poems and emblems of the *Délie* allow the poet to give both voice and image to his antithetical love. The poems and emblems may each stand on their own, but their juxtaposition reveals the degree to which Scève brings together mutually exclusive characterizations of death in a unified if antithetical presentation of Petrarchan love, itself oxymoronic. Thus, Scève's multi-media (pictorial/verbal) presentation of death as polysemous is paradigmatic of the tensions so characteristic of his poetry and of the reconciliation of opposites which is a hallmark of sixteenth-century literature.

Délie's emblems depict the "renewed deaths" which Scève announces as the subject of his poetry in the third line and emphasize the theme of death even more dramatically than do the poems. Death dominates the emblems, and their regular pattern debuting in the glossed verse of the first emblem ("En sa beaulté gist ma mort, et ma vie" [In her beauty resides my death and my life]) and concluding in the motto of the final emblem ("Après la mort ma guerre

encore me suit" [After death my war still attends me] consistently guides the reader from the opening huitain "Mais bien les mortz, qu'en moy tu renovelles / Je t'ay voulu en cest Oeuvre descrire" [But those deaths you renew in me / I wished to describe to you in this Work][1] (3–4) to the final dizain "Nostre Genevre ainsi doncques vivra / Non offensé d'aulcun mortel Letharge" [Our Juniper shall thus live on, / Unspoiled by death's Oblivion] (9–10). Emblems, in fact, are a particularly appropriate medium for a work focused on death, for according to popular Renaissance theories of symbolic representation, images were considered an intermediary medium with "le statut du corps, envelopp[é] de l'âme" [the status of the body, enveloped by the soul][2] The alternation of emblems and poems reflect the poet's love experience, torn between desires of the soul and those of the body and trapped in an exorable cycle between life and death. Just as Scève's poetry combines such seemingly incompatible concepts as microcosm and macrocosm, pagan reminiscence and Christian conviction, classical allusion and medieval remnant, and Christian Platonism and artistic immortality, so too do the emblems which gloss the poems present an interpretation of those poems which contradicts, or at the very least, reexamines the conclusions presented by the poet. Together the emblems and poems remind the reader of the antithetical nature of love in particular and of Renaissance literature in general, and the interplay between two interpretations of the same love story points up Scève's innovative rewriting of more traditional love poetry.

Those who dismiss the emblems in the *Délie* as unnecessary disruptions note that there are numerous logical discrepancies: there is not always a direct correlation between an emblem's motto and the last line of its gloss po-

---

[1] N.B. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the poems, emblems, and mottos are taken from the following: Richard Sieburth, *Emblems of desire: selections from the "Délie" of Maurice Scève* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

[2] Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani, *Emblèmes de la mort. Le dialogue de l'image et du texte* (Paris: Nizet, 1988), 15.

N.B. Translations of all texts other than the *Délie* are my own.

em; the emblems often arbitrarily break up groups of thematically similar poems; the emblems do not appear to correspond to or shape the group of poems which follow; and, in a book of love, it is odd that only two or three emblems deal with that theme. Conversely, the repetition of certain figures in the emblems that have clear thematic ties to the poetry attests to their importance. For example, Orpheus and the basilisk appear both in the emblems and in the poems even though they are not presented together as an emblem/epigram pair. On the other hand, the unicorn, although entirely absent from the dizains, appears twice in the emblems and evokes themes often found in the poems such as the contrast between sensuality and chastity and secular and religious symbolism. Yet each explanation or criticism overlooks an essential fact: although the *privilege*, the official permission to publish, stated that the work could be published *with* or *without* emblems, all editions of the *Délie* but one have been published with the emblems, and each of those editions provides an index of them. The emblems have been quite simply a standard complement to the poetry, a visual accompaniment to the verbal poems.

The modern differentiation between visual art and literary expression was not a concept in Renaissance thinking; Renaissance artists considered the two art forms to be quite similar. In fact, *peinture* denoted both a painting and a written description, just as an *histoire* could be a painting or drawing, as well as a textual argument. Two visual forms knew great success during the sixteenth century, first the *impresa* or *devise*, and second the emblem. The *impresa* is the Italian equivalent of the French *devise*—etymologically both indicate an expression of enterprise. Italian theoreticians of the sixteenth century described the *impresa* as an "illustrated metaphor" or a "verbal portrait". Emblems, however, took their name from the Latin juridical term *emblema*, meaning various types of attached or inserted ornaments which did not fundamentally change the nature of an object, and were therefore considered to be mere supplements to the text to which they were attached. Traditionally, these emblems were a three-part invention consisting of a titular inscription or motto (*inscriptio*), a picture or engraving (*figura*), and an epigrammatic text

(*subscriptio*) which described the engraving in detail. For the purposes of this discussion, I will use "emblem" to designate the combination of visual and verbal elements, "engraving" to describe the pictorial aspect of the woodcuts, and "motto" to refer to the brief written expression within the frame. Finally, the "epigram" is the poem which follows the woodcut. Although by the end of the Renaissance the emblem could be adapted to a wide variety of media and carry a wide range of messages, its first use in France (which corresponds almost exactly to the publication of the *Délie*) was restricted to the traditional presentation of a moral lesson. Scève's mottos, however, are without a lesson, and he does not use the emblems in an exclusively allegorical or moralizing manner—an absence quite conspicuous in a work subtitled "object de plus haulte vertu" [object of highest virtue].

As opposed to the emblem which teaches easily understood conventional wisdom, the *impresa/devise* is directed at the intellectual elite, hermetically veiling a personal expression within the metaphorical relationship between text and image[3] (expressed both visually and linguistically). Each encourages the reader to ferret out the relationship between its pictorial and verbal components, thereby providing a paradigm for the readers' interpretation of the poems themselves. Thus, even if Scève's three-part woodcuts (comprised of engraving, motto, and epigram) are more like emblems in form, in function they resemble the *imprese* or *devises*—first, because they substitute the generalizing and moralizing verse commentary found in the emblems proper with a more personalized message and, secondly, because, with the exception of the last one, the poems fail to describe the image explicitly.

Despite the contradictory message of the *Délie*'s *privilege* and the longstanding debate concerning the appropriate name for its woodcuts, it is not important that the engravings differed from edition to edition, that they treated subjects as diverse as Narcissus, the Tower of Babel, and weathervanes,

[3] Daniel S. Russell, *The Emblem and Device in France* (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1985), *passim*.

or even that Scève did not use them to present a moral lesson, as was tradition. Regardless of their name or of their specific function, the mere presence of woodcuts in the *Délie* teaches the reader *how* to approach the *Délie* and the fact that they impose a formal pattern on the work reminds readers to search the poetry for links between the macrocosm and microcosm, the present and the past, the human and the divine. Even if love is only explicitly mentioned once in the emblems, the heterogeneity of the engravings—from Cleopatra, to a woman churning butter, to the moon—and the conflicted states presented by their mottos—"My brightness always overcast" or "In my joy sorrow"—are a direct reflection of the duality of the love experience. In his article entitled "Emblem and Paradox", Thomas Greene evokes the *alterationes* of erotic psychology favored by Petrarch and his imitators—an endless alternation between hope and fear, heat and cold, joy and sorrow—claiming that "[i]f the poetry is working to free itself from the oxymoron, it seems to be working equally to skirt the regular, reductive traps of emblematic constriction"[4]. Greene believes that the *Délie* does manage to escape the restrictive Petrarchan condition, but that it does so "despite the immobility of the devices."[5] Scève's emblems, however, are not immobile nor are the poems attempting to overcome oxymoron, for it is precisely such antitheses which are essential to the lover's situation and to Scève's poetry.

A reconciliation of opposites requiring decoding should not seem untenable and is, in fact, essential to the comprehension of other Renaissance literature, most notably *Gargantua*. In the prologue, Rabelais explains to readers in a much more explicit manner than Scève, exactly how they should read his work in order to discover its hidden meaning. Moving from the debauchery of drunkards and the diseased to Plato's playful treatment of serious sub-

---

[4] Thomas M. Greene, "Emblem and Paradox in Scève's *Délie*," *Oeuvres & Critiques: Revue Internationale d'Étude de la Réception Critique d'Étude des Oeuvres Littéraires de Langue* 11.1 (1986): 53.

[5] Greene, "Emblem and Paradox in Scève's *Délie*," 54.

jects, Rabelais demonstrates the inextricability of the comic and the serious, the profane and the sacred, the popular and the learned that dominates his work. In fact, in the ninth chapter, Rabelais even discusses emblematics and explains that they too work by dialectics. In the *Délie*, Scève describes love as a binary state-of-being governed by antitheses—mind/senses, body/soul, life/death, light/darkness, presence/absence, desire/chastity, reason/passion, and sensuality/mysticism. The very first poem, the introductory *huitain*, begins with a note of contradiction: "Not".

A sa délie

Non de Venus les ardentz estincelles,
Et moins les traictz, desquelz Cupido tire :
Mais bien les mortz, qu'en moy tu renovelles
Je t'ay voulu en cest Oeuvre descrire.
  Je scay asses, que tu y pourras lire
Mainte erreur, mesme en si durs Epygrammes :
Amour (pourtant) les me voyant escrire
En ta faveur, les passa par ses flammes.

Souffrir non souffrir.

TO HIS DELIE
Not the scorching sparks of Venus
And less the arrows Cupid shoots:
But those deaths you renew in me
I wished to describe to you in this Work.
  I know you'll read many an error
Here, even in Epigrams this hard:
Love (all the same) seeing me write these
For your sake, drew them through his flames.

Suffer not suffer.

The poet-narrator here states that, despite his intentions, he is well aware that he strays from his announced subject ("erreurs" of line six can be read as "errors" or "meanderings"). He declares from the outset that although he wanted to write about a spiritual and immortalizing love rather than the burning passion inspired by Venus or the moment of *innamoramento* (love at first sight) as represented by Cupid, he is unable to resist writing about the carnal temptations in his love experience. "The deaths you renew in me" of the third line can, in fact, be read either as a means to immortality or as the sexual ecstasy of orgasm or *petite mort* (small death), as the French refer to it. Following this poem is a sort of isolated motto, "Suffer not suffer," which appears again after the very last poem and thus frames the *Délie* with an expression of the antitheses of love. Here, as is often the case throughout the *Délie*, love's duality is reflected in a semantic back-and-forth between lover and beloved ("you" and "me" in line three, "I" and "you" in lines four and five, "me" in line seven, and "your" in line eight). The essential duality, though, is that between love ("Venus" 1, "Cupid" 2, "Love" 7) and death ("deaths" 3, "Epigrams" 6). By referring to his poems as *epigrammes* rather than using the more traditional *rimes* (rhymes), Scève emphasizes the importance of both death and the emblems to his *canzoniere*—"epigram" is the term for the gloss poem of an emblem as well as the traditional form of epitaphs.

Throughout the *Délie* Scève seamlessly blends—both pictorially and verbally—antithetical traditions of death and presents love as a *concordia discors*. Not a single emblem depicts images of love; the plurality, however, portray scenes of death and destruction. Conversely, the poems readily display a reliance on the traditional metaphors of love poetry and only subtly introduce the role of mortality. Thematically, death appears eleven times in the mottos ("Pour te veoir je pers la vie" [To see it I lose life] (1) ; "Asses meurt qui en vain aime" [Dies enough who loves in vain] (7) ; "De mort a vie" [From Death to Life] (11) ; "Doulce la mort qui de deuil me delivre" [Sweet the death that delivers me from grief] (13) ; "Fuyant ma mort j'haste ma fin" [Fleeing my death I hasten my end] (18) ; "Mon regard par toy me tue" [I die

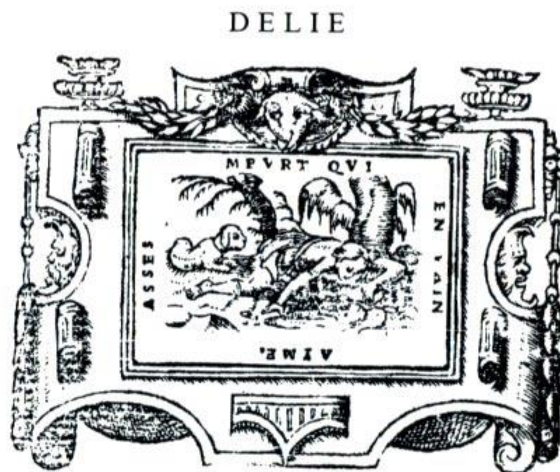
through my look in your eye] (21) ; "Pour te donner vie je me donne mort" [To give you life I give me death] (27) ; "Asses vit qui meurt quand veult" [Lives enough who dies at will] (30) ; "Le jour meurs et la nuict ars" [By day I die by night I burn] (45) ; "J'ay tendu le las ou je meurs" [I have laid the snare where I die] (46) ; "Apres la mort ma guerre encor me suyt" [After death my war still attends me] (50)) and thirteen times in the engravings (Narcissus (7); Le Phenix [Phoenix] (11) ; L'Oiseau au glus [Bird in Glue] (12) ; Dido qui se brusle (13) [Dido in Flames] ; Le Cerf [Deer] (18) ; Acteon [Actaeon] (19) ; Le Basilisque, et le Miroir [The Basilisk & the Mirror] (21); La Vipere qui se tue [The Suicide of the Viper] (27) ; Cleopatra et ses serpentz [Cleopatra & her Serpents] (30) ; Le Coq qui se brusle [Rooster on Fire] (40) ; Le Mort ressuscitant [Dead Man Emerging from Coffin] (44) ; Le Chamoys et les chiens [Chamois & Dogs] (49) ; Le Tumbeau et les chandeliers [Coffin & Candles] (50).) Thus there are seven emblems in which death is both inscribed in the motto and depicted in the woodcut—Narcissus (7), Phoenix (11), Dido (13), Deer (18), Basilisk & Mirror (21), Cleopatra (30), Coffin & Candles (50)—and it is in those emblems that life and death are most clearly opposed and united, and that the poet's love experience is delineated.

Throughout the *Délie*, Maurice Scève adapts and transforms conventional characterizations of death (suffering in love, sensual pleasure, sacrifice to an idol, and immortalization in poetry) to describe his love for Délie. None of the aforementioned metaphors of death is unique on its own, but Scève unites these often mutually exclusive ideas in a coherent representation of an incoherent emotional experience—a fusion made even more striking because he is describing love. By combining seemingly incompatible meanings of the same metaphor, Scève creates an entirely original and unified poetic representation of the paradoxical love experience. Scève's redefinition of the role of death within a discourse of desire contributes to his radical revision of various biblical, Platonist, and Petrarchan paradigms often considered integral to the *Délie*. Using an emblem/motto pair to illustrate each of Scève's four charac-

terizations of death, I will demonstrate how the emblems reinforce and enhance Scève's innovative presentation of death.

As mentioned above, familiar images and mottos of the traditional emblems are adapted to Scève's purposes, and the *imprese* and poems are merely juxtaposed rather than providing explicit glosses for one another. The incorporation of emblems provides Scève a forum in which to further showcase his originality. For just as Scève employs long-established metaphors and relies on classical allusions in his poetry to emphasize his distance from them, so too does he use iconography of traditional emblem books to call attention to his poetry's rewriting of the commonplace associations of those images. In fact, Scève's blending of genres, as well as the use of pictorial and linguistic representations, highlights his distinctive fusion of traditional, diverse metaphors of death in a single discourse of desire. Consider, for example, the Narcissus emblem and epigram[6]:

[6] N.B. All images of emblem and epigram pairs are taken from Gérard Defaux's 2004 edition: *Délie: object de plus haulte vertu*, Textes littéraires français, Ed. Gérard Defaux, 2 vols. (Genève: Droz, 2004).



L X.

Si c’est Amour, pourquoy m’occit il doncques,
Qui tant aymay, et onq ne sceuz hair ?
Je ne m’en puis non asses esbahir,
Et mesmement que ne l’offençay oncques :
Mais souffre encor, sans complainctes quelconques,
Qu’il me consume, ainsi qu’au feu la Cyre.
Et me tuant, à vivre il me desire,
Affin qu’aymant aultruy, je me desayme.
    Qu’est il besoing de plus oultre m’occire,
Veu qu’asses meurt, qui trop vainement ayme ?

The engraving shows a man looking at his reflection as per the classical myth, but the poem draws the opposite conclusion from the myth:

> If it be Cupid, why then murder me,
> Whose love was great, & never knew to hate?
> This never ceases to astonish me,
> Who never have him cause to be irate:

> Yet I allow him, without a complaint,
> To consume me, just like Wax by the fire.
> And killing me, he desires that I live,
> And loving others, cease to love myself.
> What need is there to go on slaying me?
> Who loves in vain had far enough of death?

Rather than describing the miserable fate of a narcissist, the poem reverses the paradigm, describing the lover as someone who loves his beloved so completely that he no longer loves himself and thus effectively suffers the same fate as Narcissus. In fact his fate is even worse than that described in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and explicit allusions to that text make Scève’s innovation all the more clear. The mythical Narcissus is punished by the God of Love for his cruelty towards Echo, for his refusal to love anyone but himself, and his punishment in to love in vain, to pine away after someone he can never have, his own reflection. Scève, on the other hand, has never been cruel-hearted (2) and has always faithfully followed Love’s path, suffering its consequences without complaint (5). In fact, the poet so loves Délie that he no longer loves himself (8), as opposed to Narcissus who loves himself exclusively. Both are overwhelmed by grief (lines 5 and 6) and suffer a fate worse than death – loving in vain (10).

The contradiction between poem and image is further emphasized by linguistic and thematic contradictions within the poem: words relating to death—synonyms of the verb “to kill” (lines 1, 7, 9) and “to die” of line ten—are opposed to the verb “to live” in line seven. Additionally, the four instances of the verb “to love” (lines 2, 8, 10) are opposed both to the verb “to hate” in line 2 and to the linguistically similar but semantically contradictory pairing of *de-sire* and *des-ayme* in lines seven and eight respectively. Narcissus’ unrequited love, like that of the lover of the *Délie*, leads him to perceive his existence as death-in-life. Ironically, it is the beloved’s absence which causes her to be constantly present, resulting in the lover’s incessant torment. With each

glimmer of hope that his love will be returned, the lover is reborn but, just as quickly, with each confirmation of his beloved’s indifference or absence, he loses all hope and, unable to live a life of mental and emotional suffering, dies. Neither the emblem nor the poem would make sense without the other.

If the Narcissus emblem/epigram pair demonstrates how Délie causes Scève to suffer death-in-life, the erotic imagery of the eighteenth emblem *Le Cerf* (Deer), and its motto “Fuyant ma mort j’haste ma fin” [Fleeing my death, I hasten my end] reveal that Délie is also the one who leads the poet to experience pleasure in life. The image depicts a deer with an arrow piercing its flank and alludes to the Actaeon myth in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* according to which the hunter was turned into a deer and pursued to death by his own hounds as a punishment for having seen Diana bathing. Death is thus the punishment for inappropriate sexual encounters. Scève, however, here claims that avoiding such sexual encounters with Délie will lead to his death.

DELIE

CLIX.

Si de sa main ma fatale ennemye,
Et neantmoins delices de mon Ame,
Me touche un rien, ma pensée endormye
Plus, que le mort soubz sa pesante lame,
Tressaulte en moy, comme si d'ardent flamme
L'on me touchoit dormant profondement.
　　Adonc l'esprit poulsant hors roidement
La veult fuyr, et moy son plus affin,
Et en ce poinct (à parler rondement)
Fuyant ma mort, j'accelere ma fin.

If the hand of my mortal enemy,
She, the very Soul of my delight,
Should so much as graze me,
My mind, deader than a corpse
Beneath a heavy stone, leaps awake,
My deep sleep singed by her flame.
　My spirit then stiffens with resolve

To flee both her, & me, its nearest of kin,
And at this point (if I may be so bold),
Fleeing my death, I hasten my end.

The motto "Fuyant ma mort j'haste ma fin" can be understood literally in the context of the myth—trying to escape the hounds pursuing him, Actaeon finds himself stuck on the peak of a mountain with nowhere to escape. For the poet, however, the adaptation of that motto in the tenth glossed line of the dizain means something quite different. This is one of a few poems in the *Délie* in which Scève describes real physical contact with his beloved as opposed to imagined encounters, and he claims that avoiding such contact, avoiding death ("petite mort") at the hands of the huntress Diana-Délie, will only accelerate his demise. Scève's promotion of human love—a love which incorporates both the spiritual and the physical—over the purely spiritual could not be any clearer. For Scève, the pairing of death and sexual pleasure demonstrates his belief that the "petite mort" of physical love can lead to the immortal life traditionally guaranteed by spiritual love.

The lover may reap the rewards of physical love, but his experience is not without sacrifice. Unlike the typical Petrarchan suffering mentioned above, this sacrifice in the name of love is an entirely new invention. Scève restructures the models of the feudal courtly lady and the "belle dame sans merci" by transposing the lady into a scene of pagan violent sacrifice and presenting Délie as a merciless lover who demands the ultimate oblation of her lover—his life. Again, Scève's distance from the Christian and Neo-Platonist traditions on which he is believed to have relied is evident. Scève sacrifices himself out of love, just as God did his Son, but rather than doing so to atone for his sins and to dedicate himself to God, he does so in reverence to human love and his pagan idol. Scève's aim is not a Neo-Platonist one either—he does not believe that by sacrificing himself he and Délie will return to their original union and achieve divine transcendence, but instead sacrifices his life as an ultimate sign of reverence for the woman in whom he "recreates the high heavens"

(D275:4). The thirteenth emblem, *Dido qui se brusle* [Dido's Self-Immolation] "Doulce la mort qui de deuil me delivre" [Sweet the death which delivers me from grief], depicting Dido sitting on a bed, knife in her hand, ready to stab herself as flames shoot up from the bottom of the image, portrays such a sacrifice. The emphasis is on the here and now of the human world and not on future rewards of the divine realm.

The story of Dido was popularized in Virgil's *Aeneid* in which he describes Aeneus' escape from Troy and subsequent arrival in Carthage where Dido falls madly in love with him. The gods, however, order Aeneus to ready his fleet and dispatch him to Italian lands. Dido cannot bear the thought of living without him and when she sees Aeneas' fleet leaving, she curses him and his Trojans and ascends the pyre.

DELIE

C X I V.

O ans, ô mois, sepmaines, jours, et heures,
O intervalle, ô minute, ô moment,
Qui consumez les durtez, voire seures,
Sans que l’on puisse appercevoir comment,
Ne sentez vous, que ce mien doulx tourment
Vous use en moy, et voz forces deçoit ?
Si donc le Cœur au plaisir, qu’il reçoit,
Se vient luy mesme à martyre livrer :
Croire fauldra, que la Mort doulce soit,
Qui l’Ame peult d’angoisse delivrer.

O years, O months, weeks, days, & hours,
O intervals, O minutes, O moments
Who swallow up the pain, however sour,
Without our quite knowing to what intent,
Are you not aware how my sweet torment
Wears you down in me, & mocks your powers?
Therefore if the Heart, of its own accord,
Elects the pleasures of agony

> It undergoes, Death indeed must be adored,
> Which delivers the Soul from such anxiety.

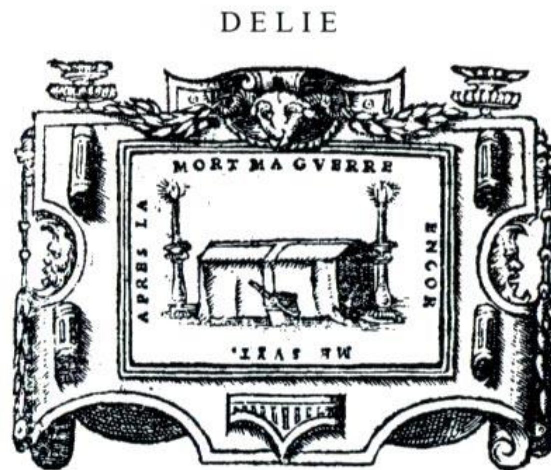
The dizain highlights the unrelenting nature of time (1–2) which compounds the poet's torment (5). In increasingly smaller intervals—from years to mere moments—Scève demonstrates how time imperceptibly gnaws away at him. He concludes, however, that time will eventually lose the battle with his heart and soul because death will inevitably come and, in fact, will be a welcome relief (9–10). Scève's perception of a sweet or gentle death is not, however, based in any Platonist principle nor any Christian tenet. The poet makes no mention of rebirth, transcendence, or salvation, but merely states that death will free him from an anguished existence. Furthermore, the emblem's evocation of the *Aeneid* directs the readers back to the Scève's unique contribution to the traditional linking of love and death—gruesome and violent scenes of pagan sacrifice incorporated into long-established poetic depiction of courtly love.

Indeed, much like Dido or Cleopatra of the thirtieth emblem who kill themselves because they cannot bear to live separated from the ones they love, Scève sacrifices himself for his beloved. There is, however, a distinct difference. Dido and Cleopatra sacrifice themselves to join their beloveds in death; Scève, on the other hand, makes of himself an oblation to Délie. From the very beginning of the *Délie*, the poet has been prepared to participate in his own death, "Car te immolant ce mien coeur pour hommage / Sacrifia avec l'ame la vie" [Since in immolating this heart of mine for you in homage / Life was sacrificed with the soul][7] (D3:5–6). Similarly, in the poem following the emblem, Scève declares his heart a martyr. But if traditional martyrs voluntarily suffer death in punishment for refusing to renounce their religion, Scève sacrifices himself because he refuses to renounce his love for Délie. She is his idol, his earthbound divinity, and without her acceptance and mutual love, Scève will suffer a life of anguish. He hopes, however, that the ultimate sacri-

[7] Translation mine.

fice of his life will win her over so that they can revel in the glories of human life here on earth.

As the only emblem to follow tradition, the final emblem, *Le Tombeau et les chandeliers* [Tomb and Chandeliers] (“Apres la mort ma guerre encor me suyt” [After death my war still attends me]), would likely have caught the attention of the Renaissance reader more than any other.



C C C C X L V I I.

Si tu t’enquiers pourquoy sur mon tombeau
L’on auroit mys deux elementz contraires,
Comme tu voys estre le feu, et l’eau
Entre elementz les deux plus adversaires :
Je t’advertis, qu’ilz sont tresnecessaires
Pour te monstrer par signes evidentz,
Que si en moy ont esté residentz
Larmes et feu, bataille asprement rude :
Qu’apres ma mort encores cy dedens
Je pleure, et ars pour ton ingratitude.

The candlesticks towering over the coffin visually indicates the triumph of life over death, just as the two flames high above the font of holy water illustrate that the love shared by Scève and Délie will never be extinguished. In fact, the holy water sprinkler (aspergillum) could also be interpreted as one of Cupid's arrows, source of the "war" waged inside the poet. But even if the fiery arrow is snuffed out by the water, the flames of love still burn strong. Finally, it should be noted that the image of the font could just as easily be interpreted as an urn evoking pagan sacrificial offerings to the dead. It is, after all, Scève's idol worship which allows him to live immortally.

Scève's confidence in and promotion of human love is perhaps bolstered by his knowledge that love will outlast even death. For, the poet's inscription of his love for Délie within his poems will assure immortality for both of them. The epigram accompanying the engraving ekphrastically describes the image:

> If you wonder why two elements
> At odds were placed upon my tomb,
> It is, you see, that water, & fire
> Are such ferocious foes:
> I remind you they serve to show
> By these manifest signs
> How tears, & fire did in me reside,
> Battling without interlude:
> That, even after death, here inside,
> I weep, & burn for your ingratitude.

The dizain more clearly proves that the poet is not a victim of death, but instead is able to transcend the paradoxical love experience—as represented by fire ("fire," 3, 8; "burn," 10) and water ("water," 3; "tears," 8; "cry," 10)—by granting Délie, and by extension his future readers, the power of interpretation. The candlesticks (a metonymy for the aforementioned fire) and the aspergillum (in turn, a metonymy for the water) bordering the tomb sym-

bolically indicate what the motto states explicitly—that the poet's suffering in love will follow him to his grave. The text goes one step further in the metaphor, transforming the *Délie* itself into the poet's tomb and clarifying that through his poems "here inside" (9), his love for Délie will continue to torment him ("I weep, & burn …" 10) long after he has died. Scève explains to his beloved that it is "very necessary" that she "see" through "manifest signs" that the contradictory elements of love, here represented metaphorically by fire and water, control the poet in life (as represented symbolically by the candles) and death (as represented metonymically by the coffin). In other words, Scève's alternating torment and ecstasy will continue even in death. Inside this closed tomb is not the poet's corpse, but his poetic corpus which is nearing its end. Following in the Horatian tradition of *Exegi monumentum*, love and its transcription into "durs epygrames" [hard epigrams], the traditional form of the emblem and the epitaph, have assured the poet's immortality.

Buttressed by the motto "souffrir non souffrir", Maurice Scève's *Délie* is an excellent example of the inextricability of antitheses, especially as it is demonstrative of a seemingly paradoxical sixteenth-century French aesthetic of returning to Greco-Roman sources all while creating something new. In both the poems and the emblems, Scève alludes to traditional narratives (Greek and Roman mythology, Platonist and Neo-Platonist texts, the Bible, and Petrarch) in such a way as to transform their meaning entirely, sometimes even to place them in a context in which their meaning is exactly the opposite of what they originally meant. For just as Scève relied on the emblem tradition but distinguished himself from that tradition by personalizing a formerly impersonal art form, so too does he rely on poets like Petrarch and Marot, all the while subtly adapting their style to the Platonist dualism which governs the world. The emblems' blending of image and text as well as their atypical presence in what the *privilège* refers to as a book of love ["Livre traictant d'Amours"] provide readers with a paradigm for the deciphering of the poems' seemingly incommensurable blending of antitheses.

This dualism—principally the dichotomies of the body and soul, of the senses and the intellect, of the individual and the cosmos—is reflected in a teleological poetry in which form reflects content. Symbols, metaphors, and allegories all exploit the relation between dissimilars, and the binary structure of analogies correlates directly to this Platonist dualism. Emblems are but another example of such analogies present in Scève's work, another mode of expression aimed at recalling history or myth, comparing the personal and the metaphysical, and at reuniting word and image, signifier with the signified. Indeed, just as Renaissance literature combines and revises traditions, so does Scève reinvent the treatment of death by systematically linking it with love, "Et, sans mourir, prouver l'experience, / Comment du Corps l'Ame on peult deslyer," [And, without dying, experience death / In the untying of the Soul from Flesh] (D278: 3–4). The *Délie*'s emblems are not merely ornamental attachments, but rather are essential to interpreting the text. Their alternation with the poems reminds the reader of the duality of the love experience, the difference in meaning between the epigram and the engraving alerts the reader to Scève's manipulation of traditional allusions, and their insistence on death emphasizes Scève's unique presentation of love as a fundamentally ontological experience. Like traditional poems of praise of the deceased, "reanimations,"[8] the poems and emblems of the *Délie* preserve the souls of the poet and his beloved, turning the inverted flame of Thanatos upright so that instead Eros' "Flamme si saincte en son cler durera" [Flame so sacred in its clarity will endure] (D449: 1), just as it does in the final emblem.

---

[8] Edélgard Dubruck, *The Theme of Death in French Poetry of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: Mouton, 1964), 112.

Appendix: Table of Emblems

1. "Pour te veoir je pers la vie" / La femme et la Lycorne
2. "Entre toutes, une parfaicte" / La Lune à deux croiscentz
3. "Pour te adorer, je vis" / La Lampe et l'Idole
4. "Plus l'attire, plus m'entraine" / L'Homme et le Boeuf
5. "Celer ne le puis " / La Lanterne
6. "A tous clarte, a moy tenebres" / La Chandelle et le Soleil
7. "Asses meurt qui en vain aime" / Narcissus
8. "Apres long travail une fin" / La Femme qui desvuyde
9. "Ma fermete me nuict" / La Targue
10. "Doulce la peine qui est accompaignee" / 2 Bœufx à la Charue
11. "De mort a vie" / Le Phenix
12. "Ou moins crains, plus suis pris" / L'Oyseau au glus
13. "Doulce la mort qui de deuil me delivre" / Dido qui se brusle
14. "Contre le ciel nul ne peult" / Tour Babel
15. "Mille revoltes ne m'ont encor bouge" / La Girouette
16. "En tous lieux je te suis" / La Cycorée
17. "Pour aymer souffre ruyne" / L'Hyerre et la Muraille
18. "Fuyant ma mort j'haste ma fin" / Le Cerf
19. "Fortune par les miens me chasse" / Acteon
20. "A tous plaisir et a moy peine" / Orpheus
21. "Mon regard par toy me tue" / Le Basilisque, et le Miroir
22. "Mes forces de jour en jour s'abaissent" Le Bateau à rames froissées
23. "Mes pleurs mon feu decelent" / L'Alembic
24. "Te nuisant je me dommage" / La Coignée, et L'Arbre
25. "Facile a decevoir qui s'asseure" / La Selle, et les deux hommes
26. "De moy je m'espouvante" / La Lycorne qui se voit
27. "Pour te donner vie je me donne mort" / La Vipere qui se tue
28. "Mon travail donne a deux gloire" / Le Forbisseur
29. "Force peu a peu me mine" / La Cye
30. "Asses vit qui meurt quand veult" / Cleopatra et ses serpentz

31. “En ma joye douleur” / Le Papillon et la Chandelle
32. “Double peine pour qui aultruy se lasse” / Le Muletier
33. “La prison m’est dur, encore plus liberte” / Le Chat et la ratiere
34. “Qui bien se voit orgueil abaisse” / Le Paon
35. “Fuyant peine travail me suyt” / L’Asne au Molin
36. “Dedens je me consume” / Le Pot au feu
37. “Ma clarete tousjours en tenebre” / La Lune en tenebres
38. “A surete va qui son faict cele” / Europa sur le bœuf
39. “Plus par doulceur que par force” / L’Arbalestier
40. “Plus l’estains, plus l’allume” / Le Coq qui se brusle
41. “Cele en aultruy ce qu’en moy je descouvre” / Leda et le Cygne
42. “Quand tout repose, point je ne cesse” / Le Vespertilion ou Chauvesory
43. “A mon labeur jour nuict veille” / L’Horloge
44. “Plus que ne puis” / Le Mort ressuscitant
45. “Le jour meurs et la nuict ars” / La Lampe sur la table
46. “J’ay tendu le lac ou je meurs” / L’Yraigne
47. “Plus l’amollis plus l’endurcis” / La Femme qui bat le beurre
48. “Plus se hante, moins s’apprivoise” / La Mousche
49. “Me saulvant je m’enclos” / Le Chamoys et les chiens
50. “Apres la mort ma guerre encor me suyt” / Le Tumbeau et les chandeliers

Works Cited

Dubruck, Edélgard. *The Theme of Death in French Poetry of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. London: Mouton, 1964.

Greene, Thomas M. "Emblem and Paradox in Scève's *Délie*." *Œuvres & Critiques: Revue Internationale d'Étude de la Réception Critique d'Étude des Œuvres Littéraires de Langue* 11.1 (1986): 53.

Mathieu-Castellani, Gisèle. *Emblèmes de la mort. Le dialogue de l'image et du texte*. Paris: Nizet, 1988.

Russell, Daniel S. *The Emblem and Device in France*. Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1985.

Scève, Maurice. *Délie: object de plus haulte vertu*. Textes littéraires français. Ed. Gérard Defaux. 2 vols. Genève: Droz, 2004.

Sieburth, Richard. *Emblems of desire: selections from the "Délie" of Maurice Scève*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.