Emblematic masterpiece:  
*The Princeton Alciati companion*

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Book-indexing techniques are being continually modified by micro-chip technology, but the end-result remains substantially unchanged. The SI's most highly honoured Founder Member, creator and practitioner of 'the unconventional index', demonstrates yet again in his latest publication a modified technique of a different kind, leading to an end-result recommended by Henry B. Wheatley in 1878: 'Indexes need not necessarily be dry, and in some cases they form the most interesting portion of the book.' (What is an index? Longmans Green, London, for The Index Society.)

Most readers of this journal will be aware that WSH is one of the world's leading experts on emblem books. Many will know also that Andrea Alciati (1492-1550) was the most distinguished and prolific creator of emblems. *Emblematum*, his first compilation of 98 emblems, was published in Augsburg in 1531. During the last nineteen years of his life, new expanded editions poured from the presses, the last in 1550 containing over 200 emblems. Princeton University has over sixty of these authentic editions, as well as more than seven hundred emblem or emblem-related books by other hands (including one by Thomas Bewick of Northumberland). The fact that there are also collections of such books in numerous universities and learned institutes in the USA, Canada, and Western Europe—notably in Germany, the Netherlands, England, Scotland—gives some indication of the vast total output and of the very considerable proportion still preserved. Yet many do not know what an emblem book is; and only the tiniest few have ever actually seen one.

*The Alciati companion* appears a fearsomely informative reference book! It begins with 111 pages of Neo-Latin Glossary, a selective list of Renaissance Latin words, with definitions, comments, and comprehensive cross-references. Next, an English (106 pp) Index listing alphabetically the English counterparts of the headwords contained in the Glossary, also with definitions, comments, internal cross-references, and abundant 'see also' references to the Glossary. Then an Appendix on Nani's *Polyanthes*, a 1607 anthology of nouns (Latin/Greek/Hebrew) open to allegorical interpretation, consisting largely of an alphabetical list of about a thousand Latin words and phrases, with page-references to the ultimate 1622 revised edition and asterisks to indicate entries referred to in the Glossary and/or Index. This is followed by the second revised edition of WSH's *Selective list of secondary sources dealing with Andrea Alciati and his Book of Emblems*, in two parts: a 428-entries Bibliography, and, a list of 54 Monographs on individual Alciati emblems, arranged numerically in accordance with the sequence established in 1621 by the publishers of the definitive edition of Alciati's *Emblematum*.

Doesn't that stimulate your cerebrum to paroxysms of excited anticipation? Indeed, William Heckscher is the creator of the concept of the Unconventional Index. Rereading *The Indexer*, 13 (1) April 1982, 6–25, may revive memories of the seminal article in which WSH presented this frontier-expanding idea. 'The type of Index I have in mind,' he wrote, 'should be more than the carefully tended cemetery of the ideas expressed in the... text'. It will be 'the Index which has a life of its own, which may pride itself on being the child of the imagination, and which should enable us to spend a peaceful evening in bed, reading such an Index, as if we were reading a good novel'.

The English Index in this publication conforms most happily with that precept. So, more surprisingly, does the Neo-Latin Glossary. Both are replete with stimulating ideas and almost encyclopaedic information, providing illuminating and enjoyable reading even for those with little or no acquaintance with emblems and emblem books. (For a summary account of these see *The Indexer* 13 (3) April 1983, 210.) To the best of my knowledge, this is the first published index dedicated by its compiler to the Society of Indexers' founding father: 'In Memory of G. Norman Knight to whose guidance and friendship the compiler of this Index is deeply indebted.' Much are we all, not only in SI but also in ASI and AusSI and IASC.

WSH's exemplary prefatory note to the English Index affirms that it is 'designed to stand on its own feet'. What I find most stimulating about both Index and Glossary is that each so satisfyingly enriches the other. Take, for example, the head-word so central to our profession: 'index'. In the Index the entry reads simply 'an alphabetically arranged, analytical index', with a cross-reference to the Glossary; there, the neo-Latin equivalent (also 'index') carries a highly informative entry of more than 200 words, with 'see also' refs to 'alphabeti'/catalogus'/elenchus'/(which turns out to be 'elenicus', the Latinized form of ἡλέκωσις)/'glossarium'/inscriptionio'/inventarium' (an entry omitted by the printer)/moralizatio' (an entry of some 500–600 words, intensely interesting though only of modest relevance)/motto' (a 200-word entry which provokes the realization that there is a subtle relationship between the maxim, which in an emblem is called the 'epigram' and in the fables of Aesop is called a 'moral', and the Heckscherian concept of an 'index entry' in an Unconventional Index)/pittacium'/μιμησις'/pinax') (pinacoteca' is primarily a picture gallery, as in Munich's Alte Pinakotheke)/repertorium' (from the verb 'reperire' = 'to find again')/superscriptio'/titulus' (an entry of about 1,000 words, reminding us that before the invention of the printing press, manuscript 'books' had no title-page but were identified by preliminary summaries of the contents, in effect the forerunners of the information retrieval system now known as 'back-of-the-book indexes').

This particular chain of cross-references gives some idea of the intensely fertile stream of relationships along which WSH's unique method of indexing enables the mind to float. In this context we may regard both Glossary and Index as interactive Unconventional Indexes. Astonishingly, here are indexes which can be read, with enjoyment as well as enlightenment. Even more surprising, these pleasures and insights—though always relevant to Alciati and his emblems—often open the reader's mind to new avenues of thought on matters previously taken for granted.

Perhaps the most striking stimulus of this kind is the Index entry: 'humour'. This runs to about 4,000 words, demonstrating with copious quotation from the literature of Classical times that what was then conducive to laughter was anything or anybody that could be laughed at. So long-lasting was this pattern that medieval laughter was still provoked by irony and satire, malice and moral superiority. Only at the Renaissance did there emerge a new kind of ego-including laughter, laughing with. WSH tends to regard the year 1511 as the watershed—the date of publication of Erasmus's Ship of Fools. WSH holds Erasmus in such high esteem that it would be churlish not to go along with the view that he originated what we describe as 'a sense of humour' (something different from an ability to make people laugh). 'Erasmian humour,' he calls it, which 're-echoes through the ages, as we find it in Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Molière, Sterne...'. Send your additions to this list (signed, please!) to the writer of this review.

Index and Glossary offer dozens of entries which are in fact essays, varying widely in length, almost all demonstrating the truth of Erwin Panofsky's admiring (or exasperated?) exclamation, 'My God, Heckscher is so learned!' (p 232). He wrote these words to Heckscher himself, in the context of WSH's intimate familiarity with Nani's Polyanthea of 1607; but WSH points out that his attention was drawn to this most important source-work by other scholars, including the SI's late President, Robert Collison, author of Encyclopaedias: their history throughout the ages (1964). The Appendix on Polyanthea in the work under review is valuable in itself, but is also WSH's generous acknowledgement of the contribution that Nani's highly specialized 'thesaurus' has made to the comprehensiveness of the Glossary and Index.

The voluminous two-part Bibliography includes books, articles, essays, monographs, and other relevant material published during the last almost five centuries, in Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Latin, Spanish, Swedish, and a few in other European languages. Some entries include comments, always helpful, at times amusing (e.g. 'highly recommended—but why?'). The Latin section of OUP's famed Dictionary Department comes in for some rough treatment: Lewis & Short's Latin Dictionary, though 'of central importance', is given a parenthetic slap-on-the-hand—'(verbs, alas, cited in the first person singular)'; and the recent Oxford Latin Dictionary 'unfortunately excludes... thereby limits its scope... the user will look in vain for...', leading to the knockout blow, 'The work is truly the glorification of a dead language'.

Heckscher exhorts us to 'recognize that the art of (Alciati's) time very soon began to become alert to the importance of emblematic thinking and seeing'. This exhortation is not merely addressed, I believe, to those engaged in the specialized study of emblems and emblem books; neither is it just a historical statement about the new modes of perception which enabled Renaissance man to inaugurate in the early sixteenth century a new era in human history. I see it rather as an injunction to ourselves, now, to seek out the subtle relationship between word and image, to perceive the allegorical implications of both, to be sensitive to the multi-layered implications of art and literature—and indeed of all forms of human communication.

The Princeton Alciati companion is indeed a most comprehensive reference work covering a highly recondite field. It is also an inspiration to thinkers, a model for indexers, and—in its own astonishing way—a masterpiece.