Afterword

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Any student of the early modern period knows that it was the time of the word – or even more specifically, of the spoken word. This oft-repeated claim has obvious merit. Early modern audiences were, or must have been, adept at listening to language, deriving from it joy in its rhythms and sounds, catching its puns and multiplicities of meaning, understanding its deeper resonances and sustaining concentration over time. Sermons would last for hours on end, with relatively little in the way of visual distractions; theatre plays required an attentive audience; verbal dispute and oratory were highly refined arts.

The written word was also widely understood. Among the gentry and the aristocracy, literacy was virtually total, and the rise of print culture ensured that the dissemination of writing would only increase.

The word was dominant, yet, this special issue of EMCO focuses on visual culture, especially the way in which visual concerns always accompanied the verbal. Despite the iconoclasm seen in many European countries, visual communication (often formalized and codified) remained an important and ubiquitous factor in all walks of life, from instructing the illiterate to pleasuring or challenging intellectuals.

Even when we look at words unaccompanied by concrete illustrations, they are often strikingly pictorial. One example from the King James Bible:

> After this, opened Iob his mouth, and cursed his day. And Iob spake, and said, Let the day perish, wherein I was borne, and the night in which it was said, There is a man-childe conceiued. Let that day bee darkenesse, let not God regard it from aboue, neither let the light shine vpon it. Let darkenes and the shadowe of death staine it, let a cloud dwell vpon it, let the blacknes of the day terrifie it. (Job 3.1-5)

Light and dark, clouds and shadows, and above all the importance of seeing as a way of knowing. Illumination, in all senses of the word, was important for the early moderns, and they would be used to having the importance of light and sight confirmed repeatedly from reading their Bible. But the early moderns were sometimes sceptical about that which only the eye could see and the soul not feel. Shakespeare addresses this subject frequently and would interrogate the relationship between the illusions of the theatre and the complex relationship between it and the truth. In *The Tempest*, for example, every vision, be it of storms, harpies or dancing nymphs, is an illusion and every example is with some fanfare "discovered," dissolved and laid bare. Yet, ultimately the play suggests that these illusions have a value and a power belied by their ephemeral nature: superficial appeals to the senses may be fleeting, but this does not meant they are not to be taken very seriously. Another playwright interrogating the possibly deceptive nature of vision is Christopher Marlowe, in whose *Doctor Faustus*, the duke of Vanholt thanks the doctor for "these pleasant sights; nor know I how sufficiently to recompense your great deserts in erecting that enchanted castle in the air, the sight

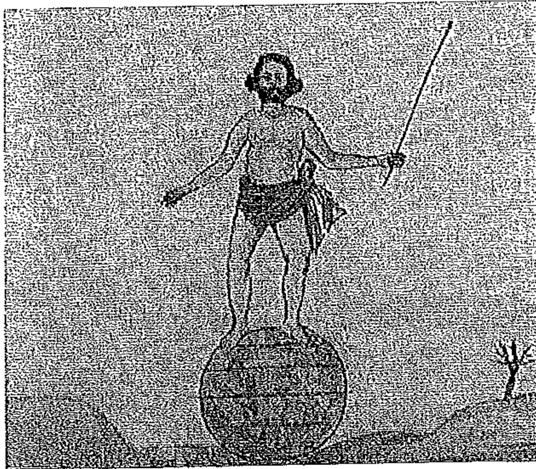

Figure 1

Above: Henry Peacham, "Man the Microcosm," c. 1610. In Alan Young, *Henry Peacham's Manuscript Emblem Books*. University of Toronto Press, 1998.

Right: Richard Appignanesi (adapt.) and Paul Duffield (adapt., illus.), *The Tempest*. © SelfMadeHero, 2007.

whereof delighted me as nothing in the world could please me more" (4.6.1-5). We know, of course, as the Duke does not, that Faustus' magical power to create visions is given him by Mephistopheles and that therefore these visions must be demonic in nature.

But even though the visual was sometimes treated with scepticism and distaste, this is only testament to its power to seduce and impress. Artists and propagandists knew how to utilize this power – and they would often do this in manners that some would now call multimodal.

The emblem book tradition, which originated in Italy and was especially popular during the early modern period, is perhaps the Renaissance's most explicit and salient example of visual/verbal rhetoric. There seems to have been a notion in this period that images were more truthful than words, or that they were, somehow, closer to "the thing itself" than words could ever be. "Emblems are not simply a quaint small form of negligible importance," Charles Moseley writes in the article that appears in this issue, "in their time, in their complex allusiveness and ambiguity of relationship between words and picture, they were aggressively topical, analytical and coded utterances." And further, "visual symbol was the usual Renaissance way of conceptualizing abstraction" (3). Thus, the relationships between the concrete and the abstract, the truthful and the speculative, the physical and the metaphysical, the mundane and

the magical were given unique emphases in the meeting between the word and the image, like in emblem books, but also in other types of works, like Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, portraits of royalty (when containing verbal elements), alchemical diagrams, frontispieces and the entire range of print culture in general.

One of the most central implications of the term "early modern" is the suggestion that it denotes the beginning or formation of something that is still ongoing – that whatever was going on in music, language, politics, finance, exploration, colonization, science, philosophy and the visual and verbal arts somehow influenced and shaped the world we live in today. At the same time, as has been mentioned, the early modern was a period during which medieval structures remained deeply entrenched in all aspects of life. This was no coincidence. Despite its innovations, the early modern population was conservative. The Reformation, for example, did not take place because the people and religious scholars wanted a new religion; on the contrary, they wanted a form of worship that was closer to the original, freed from the novelties that had accrued on the face of Religion since the time of the early Christians (which is why the Anglican Church calls itself a "Catholic" Church). These issues are vital for how we understand the early modern period and how we receive it; there is probably no unbroken line between the traditions, figures and concepts presented in this issue of EMCO and us. Some major cultural shifts, some to do with scientific discovery, some to do with literary and artistic innovation of a more profound kind, some to do with religion and psychology, and some to do with war and politics, have ensured that modern man and early modern man, should they ever meet, would have problems communicating; their world views would be too divergent. Yet, sometimes interesting things happen that reveal how transhistorical communication is a possibility, even if it may be classified as a type of atavism.

Figure 1 is a juxtaposition of an illustration from Matthew Wagner's article "Wheresoever the Body Is" (11-30) and a splash page from a modern comic book. More specifically, the left-hand illustration is a *pictura* from an emblem book manuscript by Henry Peacham, where the concept of "man as microcosm" is delineated as a man with a staff in his left hand, standing on top of a globe; the right-hand image is a moment in a scene from a Shakespeare play, somewhat emblem-like in the manner it combines the visual and the verbal. It too features a man (in this case Prospero) with a staff in his left hand, standing on top of a globe. This second image is taken from SelfMadeHero's *Manga Shakespeare: The Tempest* (2007). In it, Prospero is in the middle of his "our revels now are ended" speech (which would be 4.1.146-63 in a textual edition), standing on top of a globe, in front of what looks like The Globe and, further in the background, dilapidated, cloud-capped towers, the future remnants of a doomed civilization. His word balloons lack the little indexical arrows that normally would point them to a speaker, thus making it less clear who is speaking and on what kind of diegetic level this scene takes place (at least if seen in isolation). I asked the illustrator, Paul Duffield, whether he had seen Peacham's emblem (made around the same time as Shakespeare's play) or anything similar to it. His response, via e-mail, was as follows: "I have studied both art history and the history of illustration as part of my training in illustration and animation, so I might be familiar with similar illuminations from different sources," but

> when I composed the image, I derived it from the text rather than from another graphical source, and as you noticed, it was intended to highlight the double meaning in the use of the word "globe," but also to bring to mind the famous quote from *As You Like It* [cf. the *Theatrum Mundi*], which seemed quite appropriate at that point! In that respect, it's partly coincidence, but partly because Prospero himself represents man as a creator and manipulator, and Shakespeare used the image of Prospero's staff, and the visual metaphor of the globe in conjunction with that, from which I drew the image.

From this we might observe two things. One: in some writings, and perhaps especially in works by Shakespeare, powerful visual constellations are packed into the words, and may be unpacked by visual artists. Manga and comics have the potential to illustrate and present *ideas* (conceptualised through the distribution and juxtaposition of visual and verbal elements) as well as narratives (a sequence of panels and word balloons) and is therefore not entirely dissimilar to the emblem tradition or even the theatre. Two: the resulting visuals may be understood – even at a glance – in the present-day reception of early modern verbal art. The majority of readers will understand that Prospero in the manga does not in fact stand on top of a globe, but that he, in tandem with the words, now exists in the realm of the symbolic. (He moves in and out of this realm throughout the manga.) It seems that at least on some levels, modern man or woman can understand complex visual-verbal constellations that derive from another time period. There are of course differences: current readers are not familiar with the emblem tradition and its implications, while early modern readers would perhaps be taken aback by Duffield's lightly Japanese-inspired drawing style. I imagine they would quickly get used to reading manga and comics, though, since both the setting of images in a sequence and the use of speech bubbles (of sorts) already existed in early modern visual culture. The differences are less important now, what matters is that despite the time that has passed, we may sometimes catch glimpses of the early modern visual-verbal idiom and conclude that we actually understand what is going on.

Naturally, the articles included in this issue cannot come anywhere close to creating an exhaustive overview of the field of verbal/visual rhetoric, but taken together it is interesting to note how they revolve around similar concerns and issues, most of which have already been mentioned, but which may be repeated: the relationship between the traditions of the past and the possibility of innovation, the exploration of the role of man both as material body and philosophical concept, and the actual representation of verbal and visual forms, i.e. how early modern visual/verbal rhetoric actually works, in contrast with that which came before and after it.