EMCO#5

Special Issue on Early Modern Visual/Verbal Rhetoric

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"Special Issue on Early Modern Visual/Verbal Rhetoric"

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Table of Contents

A note on EMCO

It's not quite a sea-change into something rich and strange, but this issue of EMCO marks a moment of transition for the journal, after a period of seeming inactivity during which much has happened behind the scenes. While there is nothing wrong with the traditional journal format to which EMCO has adhered, we have found it pertinent to move towards a wider scope of approaches to early modern culture.

The backbone of the journal will still be peer-reviewed articles on topics related to early modern literature, art, music, philosophy, history and language, but in addition to this we have now added a section for book reviews and a more easily readable and flexible layout. The new, dual-column design enables us to more easily integrate into the layout illustrations and tables of various sizes.

Furthermore, we have also decided to expand the scope for types and lengths of articles we will publish. Now we will accept short "notes," more essayistic and speculative articles, and survey articles, in addition to the traditional research pieces we already publish. This is only the beginning, however. In future issues we would like to invite other types of contributions, ranging from opinion pieces to short "encounters" with early modern art works. A more detailed account of the types of contributions we would like to see and present can be found in the back of this issue.

We hope you will enjoy this special issue of EMCO and the new format of the journal.

Introduction
Early Modern Visual/Verbal Rhetoric

Svenn-Arve Myklebost

Visual/verbal rhetoric is a vast field of study, even when limited to Europe in the historical period that we now call the *early modern*, during which it was perhaps especially complex. This period was one of transitions, chiefly from the medieval into something else. The rhythm and pace with which these transformations took place differed between European nations, according to fashion, religious developments, degree of prosperity, the tides of war, taste, and, quite simply, chance. It took centuries for some innovations and forms to disseminate across the continent. But by and by, the nations of Europe fell into step; it is possible, therefore, to speak of the early modern world picture as a pan-European phenomenon, albeit with some exceptions and many notable variations of idiom. The reformation, one of the most salient changes of the period, played itself out quite differently in different European countries. France had Calvin (for a while) and religious wars. Germany had Luther. Italy never had a reformation and Spain too remained predominantly Catholic. The development of the Church of England was especially complicated. From Henry VIII' s break with the Pope, to Edward VI and Somerset's stronger move towards Protestantism, to the Catholic resurgence under Mary to Elizabeth's middle way, the Anglican Church came to be what it is slowly, with setbacks and by increments over a period of nearly 100 years. And yet, far into the reigns of James and Charles I, adherence to the old faith still lingered in various corners of Great Britain, concurrently with segregational puritanism. This gradual transformation is typical for how England became something other than it was, all the while retaining many of its underlying structures. "The world in which Shakespeare lived," writes Helen Cooper,

> was a medieval one. Stratford and its surrounding towns had been founded in the Middle Ages: Coventry, which owed its status as a city to its Norman Cathedral; Warwick, grown up around its castle; Oxford, fortified with castle and walls early in the Middle Ages, and given fame by the development of its university in the late twelfth century.... Early modern London remained a city defined by its enclosing walls, its bridge, its great cathedral, and its internal structure of parishes and their churches. … England's topography, infrastructure and rhythms of life were still essentially medieval. (1)

We might envision a medieval parchment manuscript of grids, lines, street plans and hierarchies upon which bright and novel daubs of paint began to be limned in.

Much of the newness in early modern England stemmed from what we would today call globalism. The term may be an anachronism, but the fact remains that the known world had become both bigger and more closely connected. Trade with the Ottoman Empire on the one hand, and the exploration and exploitation of the New

World on the other influenced the English mind set. And in addition to the exchange of goods came an increased exchange of ideas, from the time of Erasmus (at the very least) onwards. In this vein, Europe had become much more close-knit, despite traditional enmities and religious conflict. Sometimes, religious or political content would prevent a specific form from spreading, but often this does not seem to have mattered.

It is therefore natural for articles revolving around visual/verbal rhetoric in the early modern period both to trace how medieval traditions survived, albeit in altered form, as well to investigate how the early modern was a time of innovation where practices were instituted that still survive to this day on an international scale. This is precisely what the articles in this issue do.

In the article entitled "What's in a Name?: James Burbage and his Playhouse," Charles Moseley establishes what may be seen as a framing device for this issue of EMCO: his discussion of The Theatre playhouse (later to be rebuilt and renamed – significantly – as The Globe) demonstrates how the innovation and novelty of calling a playhouse "The Theatre" has been obfuscated by the subsequent familiarity of the word "theatre". This word was so little known in English around the time that whenever it did in fact appear it was often given a marginal gloss. Its primary application before James Burbage's playhouse was so named, was in the realm of anatomical theatres, such as the ones in Salamanca (completed in 1554) and in Leiden (1594). The term was known (in specialist circles) in the Latin, as part of the concept of the *Theatrum Mundi* – the theatre of the world – later made famous by Shakespeare and many others. But the world was not "a stage" in the early conception of "theatre". Now we may be accustomed to think of "the stage" and "the theatre" as synonyms, but when The Theatre was constructed in 1576, the name would have brought to mind – at least for those in the know – *the dissection of man* before an audience watching from surrounding concentric circles. This act of naming, then, is itself a statement of intent and an artistic and philosophical definition of the potential of a playhouse as something designed to instruct as well as entertain.

There are fruitful links between Moseley's article and the following piece by Matthew Wagner, entitled "Wheresoever the Body Is: Image, Matter and Corporeality on Shakespeare's Stage". In a way, the focus of this article is nested within the context established by Moseley: Wagner identifies parallels between the manifestation of the body on the stage and the position of man within the cosmos. As with the body laid out in the anatomical theatre, man is the centre of the cosmos. The alchemical and astrological diagrams featured in Wagner's article situate man in the centre of concentric circles, this time constituting the heavenly spheres. Man, moreover, is a cosmos unto himself – a microcosm within which all the truths of creation exist. It is significant, therefore, that *man* in these diagrams and emblems is habitually placed upon a globe or in the centre of a design based on circles; the metaphor is complex, rich and strange enough in itself, but it becomes even more striking when we remember that in the imagination of the early modern period that which is made manifest in visual or even corporeal terms is something very close to the truth, whatever that truth may be. No wonder puritans and princes feared the theatre.

Zooming even closer in on the human, Anne Sophie Refskou and Laura Søvsø Thomasen's article "Handling the Theme of Hands in Early Modern Cross-Over Contexts," details the language of gesture, pointing and touching, with special reference to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*. This article contributes to deepen our understanding of how the pre-Cartesian imagination, where the mind-body divide was not a given, challenges current ideas about the significance of the body and its place, both within the cosmos and on the theatre stage. Furthermore, like in the previous article, Løvsø and Thomasen investigate and present how these ideas were transmitted and debated through visual media, including John Bulwer's illustrated treatise on hands, and the stage practice of Shakespeare's time – in short, how the visual/verbal rhetoric functioned in nearly-seamless yet mutually enriching cooperation.

Visual/verbal rhetoric, or rather anti-rhetoric, is also at the core of Sandra Pietrini's article, "Anti-Rhetorical Strategies in Early Modern Images of Comic Actors: Harlequin's Iconography and its Surviving Medieval Features." It presents a fascinating account of the theme touched upon in the first part of this introduction: that mediaeval features exist in an early modern context, but in residual forms that were devoid of sense or inscribed with new meanings. Pietrini traces the sometimes mysterious origins of these features, still visible in Tristano Martinelli's 1601 book *Compositttions de Rhétorique de Monsieur Don Arlequin*, but originating in a tradition which is in fact medieval and in which the iconographic elements connected with the Harlequin figure carry meanings that were about to become lost, including those of sinful folly and the demonic. Martinelli captures the Harlequin in a moment of transition and also inscribes the figure with meanings both old and new, martial and parodic, direct and ironic, after which it was destined to experience "a gradual loss of this charming heritage and display of signs," to become "the well-known domesticated figure wearing a *patchwork of devised pieces* and devoting himself more and more to courtly activities such as wooing," according to Pietrini.

This special issue then circles back to where it began, with an article focused on architecture – what it represents as well as what it was deemed it ought to represent, specifically in the print medium. Ayşegül Yayla's "Representations of Architecture in Lucas van Leyden's Prints" debates whether Van Leyden was a medieval artist, a Renaissance artist or both of the above. Van Leyden's prints are salient examples of works than contain clear uses of both Middle Age and Early Modern devices. The spatial perspectives and general layouts of Van Leyden's images are clearly inspired by Italian art (and his contact with Albrecht Dürer), but the clustering of crowds, the depicted architecture, and the use of ornament all point back to a medieval type of iconography.

This final article also addresses something which most of the articles in this issue have in common: a connection with print culture. Yayla believes Van Leyden got his Renaissance influence from prints. John Bulwer does not merely describe how gestures of the hand work: he shows it as well, as do Refskou and Thomasen in their article. The idea of man as microcosm, just to mention one out of many concepts outlined in Wagner's article, is most powerfully expressed in visual terms, in engravings that carry fascinating, half-forgotten magical and astrological significances. The history of the Hellequin/Harlequin can now more easily be

traced in manuscripts and engravings than in any verbal history. And I am sure that whoever thought of drawing parallels between playhouses and anatomical theatres, as described in Moseley's article, had seen prints, drawings and descriptions of such buildings on parchment or on paper rather than in the life; on this we can only speculate, but ultimately, there can be little doubt that visual materials would have been fairly easily accessible and increasingly popular. This in itself is as good a reason as any to study the form.