


Perspectives *on the*

Renaissance Medal



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"Un Gran Pelago": The Impresa and the Medal Reverse in Fifteenth-Century Italy

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BROADLY SPEAKING, there are no strictly contemporary writings on either the making or the significance of the fifteenth-century impresa. Theoretical discussions of imprese do not appear until the mid-sixteenth century, by which time the medium itself had changed significantly. For the Renaissance art historian, this is not an unusual problem. Scholars trying to understand the intricacies of fifteenth-century painting, for example, have similar difficulties since most of the theoretical literature on art dates from the mid- to late sixteenth century. The veracity of Vasari's writings on fifteenth-century art, for example, is now regularly challenged as it has become increasingly clear that his knowledge of the artistic centers outside of Florence during the centuries prior to his own was extremely tenuous.¹ Beyond this, however, even relying on strictly contemporary fifteenth-century sources—such as Alberti or Filarete—provides limited benefits when it comes to the vexing task of tracing the sort of iconographic clues contained within a fifteenth-century impresa.²

Nevertheless, most scholars interested in the fifteenth-century impresa have tended to turn to the sixteenth century for answers. In particular, they look to the late Renaissance visual and literary conceit of the emblem, which was fully and repeatedly defined by late-sixteenth-century authors in a veritable flurry of detailed treatises and recipe booklets, compiled for those princelings eager to compose their own weighty emblems. Unfortunately, though, the earliest of the twentieth-century scholars of the emblem, such as Volkman and Praz, tended to conflate the information contained in the primary sources and present the emblem as if it were a generally agreed-upon, static, and fundamentally literary form.³ By extension, since the word *impresa* is regularly used by

sixteenth-century theorists to describe a genre of pictographs closely related to the emblem, it was argued that the sixteenth-century impresa and its fifteenth-century antecedent were similarly fixed and definable forms. As more recent research has shown, however, the sixteenth-century emblem was a highly malleable format, whose definition lay almost entirely in its function.⁴ That is to say, the form of the emblem changed as needs changed, not only from generation to generation, but from treatise to treatise. The emblem was a means through which certain sorts of ideas were expressed, and the "correct" understanding of any particular emblem depended on comprehending not only the literary or pictorial content of the emblem, but also on recognizing the particular theoretical model upon which that specific emblem had been based. With our preconceptions about the boundaries of the sixteenth-century emblem redefined, however, can one justify a similar re-evaluation of the fifteenth-century impresa?

Perhaps one of the most frustrating aspects of working on the impresa is an inability to find agreement in any of the literature—primary or secondary—on a concise definition of the impresa. It is defined variously as being synonymous with the device, the badge (*scutium*) and the printer's mark (*insigne*).⁵ It has been called "a symbolical representation of a purpose, a wish, a line of conduct...by means of a motto and a picture which reciprocally interpret each other" and an "instrument of our intellect, composed of figures and of words, which represent metaphorically the interior concetto of the academic" and "the meaning of our mind placed within a knot of words and things...the philosophy of the knight, just in the same way that poetry is the philosophy of the philosopher."⁶

On the other hand, though, this multiplicity could be cited to reconfirm the idea that the *impresa*, like the emblem, was considered a flexible medium, capable of changing form depending on the purpose for which each is needed.

One of the most-frequently cited quotations regarding the *impresa* is Paolo Giovio's claim that: "the *impresa* must not be so obscure that it needs a sibyl to interpret it, but at the same time, it should not be so clear that every pleb can understand it."⁷ Again, this is a sixteenth-century definition, but there seems ample cause to see the origins of this apparently contradictory urge toward both clarity and obscurity in the precursors of heraldic imagery. One of the prime functions of heraldic imagery is to be understood. An army's colors are the rallying point for the troops in the field. A knight's colors identify him as friend or foe. Heraldic figures not only indicated the identity of the owner, but also provided vital signals concerning his past achievements or aspects of character he wished to proclaim (the use of a lion, for example, might indicate "leonine," or kingly virtues).⁸ Arms can denote their bearer's political aspirations or heritage, as well as detail the titles to which he laid claim or allegiance.⁹ In all of these guises, heraldry functions primarily in the same way—namely, as a means of identification in the sense of saying "this is what I am," "this is what I believe in," "this is to whom I am attached," or "this is what is attached to me."

The melding of identity with symbol seems to be a cultural constant, but it makes itself most keenly felt when the symbol embraces group identity. As in the late twentieth century this occurs on associative grounds, so in the late fourteenth century the city of Florence went some distance toward limiting the increasing power of the local guilds merely by outlawing the tradition by which each guild marched under its own banner in civic processions.¹⁰ Slightly later, during the Ciompi revolt in the summer of 1378, the heraldic banner acted as the vitalizing symbol of the revolution:

The rise and fall of the Ciompi can be documented by the flags under which they presented themselves. They began by carrying the banner of the furrier's guild, progressed to the communal *Libertà* banner; and reached the height of their power when they seized the standard of Justice. The final creation of their own arms—an image of the archangel Gabriel armed with a sword and a cross—established them as an autonomous, ruling force in Florence.¹¹

The downfall of the Ciompi is seen by contemporary chroniclers as being inextricably linked to the fortune of their flag. On August 31, 1378, the government ordered all of the guilds to assemble in the Piazza della Signoria and hand over their flags. The Ciompi refused, claiming, "But if we do not have a flag, around what would we rally?" The Ciompi banner was then not only seized and thrown from an upper-story window of the Palazzo Vecchio, but it was cut into three pieces and trampled underfoot by the waiting crowd below. The crowd then rushed to the house in which the banner formerly had been kept and burned it to the ground.¹² This extraordinary story serves to underline how firmly this idea of banner, color, and image was fixed in the fourteenth-century Florentine psyche.

As much as there are those who cherish a sense of group identity, there are also those who do not want to be identified as part of a larger group or those who, for whatever reason, want to conceal their allegiances or to proclaim them only to a limited audience. During the late fourteenth century, the practice of bearing arms or heraldic devices had become such a commonplace that many of the elite felt betrayed. The malaise caused by the proliferation of symbols is well captured in Franco Sacchetti's lament:

A few years ago, everybody saw all the workpeople down to the bakers, how all the wool-carders, usurers, money-changers and blackguards of all descriptions became knights.... How art thou sunken, unhappy dignity! Of all the long list of knightly duties, what single one do these knights of ours discharge? I wish to speak of these things that the reader might see that knighthood is dead.¹³

For people like Sacchetti, the original purpose of the heraldic language was no longer being served so another strategy for self-identification needed to be devised—one which carried with it the cachet of limiting intelligibility, or to cite Paolo Giovio again, "it should not be so clear that every pleb can understand it." In theoretical terms, this shift of purpose represents a kind of mannerism: when the formal elements of a given language are subverted to serve a purpose that was not its original intent. The impetus behind this development, however, was largely reactionary, and as such, was closely tied to previous conventions. To a large extent, the idea of limiting intelligibility can be traced back to two aspects of the ro-

mantic mystique associated with chivalric pageantry: the moral quest of the knight errant and the conventions of romantic love, both of which were particularly well suited to the task as both provided a personalization of the more general conventions of heraldic proclamation.

In the first case, the imagery of heraldry was modified to symbolize a knight's moral quest. The knight, as a Christian soldier, was duty-bound not only to fight for his king, but to fight for the greater glory of God. An implied part of the contract was for the knight to perfect his own, noble, Christian virtues. As Michael Pastoureau has suggested, this "additionality" was expressed through a change in the knight's armor, which during the second half of the fourteenth century, began to take on what he calls "para-heraldic" elements, such as helmet crests and supports. These, he argues, were exclusively used for the proclamation of a knight's personal hopes and endeavors.¹⁴ In French, the contract binding a knight to his lord—the chivalric vow—is called *l'emprise*. It is his "undertaking" or his "enterprise." Accordingly, a body of images was developed by the aristocratic classes solely to serve the purpose of symbolizing their commitment to knightly virtue, their *emprise*.

The second alteration in the rules of heraldic language was generated by the contorted business of chivalric love. Erotic desire during the latter Middle Ages was both bound and unbound by the poetic imagination. Allegory was the medium through which forbidden passions were contained and covertly proclaimed. For example, Jouveal des Ursins tells us that in 1414 the dauphin carried a standard embroidered with a golden letter K, a picture of a swan (*le cygne*) and a golden letter L. Put together, these indicated his love for the daughter of a certain Guillaume Cassinelle, who was employed as one of his mother's ladies-in-waiting.¹⁵ The purpose of the rebus was to limit intelligibility to those who possessed sufficient wit to untangle it.

In his *Waning of the Middle Ages*, Jean Huizinga argues that the difference between the French Middle Ages and the Italian Renaissance was less a change of ethos, than one of focus. Men of both ages were concerned with the achievement of personal glory and honor that would ensure them a place in history. More recent scholars might

dismiss Huizinga's observations as being a simplification of the true state of things. Indeed, as is abundantly clear, Renaissance man's interest in things chivalric and the structures and cultural assumptions codified by both the reality and the mythology of medieval knighthood remained undimmed throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.¹⁶ Nevertheless, it would be equally short sighted not to recognize the extent to which the reawakening of a huge corpus of texts and images specifically linked to the classical age not only augmented, but significantly changed the parameters of what history was thought to be. The historical panorama for medieval man was primarily religious, a view in which many of the chivalric conventions fitted comfortably. For the Renaissance man, there was a newly opened window on the past and the opportunity to redefine the ways in which one might fit into the wider scheme of history. Seen from this perspective, Huizinga's dictum stands up rather better—the focus of man's gaze had changed because there was a whole field of other things at which to look.

The development of the Italian *impresa* as the rephrasing of a chivalric convention provides an interesting test case to this theory. Though contemporary documents are lacking, the visual evidence seems to suggest that the French *emprise* was imported into fifteenth-century Italy as yet another piece of the immense baggage connected to the Italian fascination with the northern courts of Anjou, Burgundy, and Provence. One only need consider the early-fifteenth-century paintings and miniature illuminations, in which those who are meant to be fashionably dressed or "worldly" are dressed in what are demonstrably French fashions. In many cases, these "worldly" folk are shown with French, Latin or even Greek mottos on the hems or sleeves of their tunics. Not surprisingly, the convention appears most consistently in representations of the Journey of the Magi (see Figure 4.1).¹⁷ Even the relatively sober Lorenzo de' Medici is described by contemporary diarists as being accompanied by "a brigade of youths wearing his livery, each page's *ciopetta* richly embroidered with beautiful words."¹⁸ That the Italian *impresa* seems to stem from French "fashion" is important as it contradicts the current scholarly opinion that the Italian *impresa* developed either out of the influence

of military dress or from the rediscovery of the Greek text of the *Hieroglyphica* of Horapollon. The former notion derives from Praz's misrepresentation of Giovio's discussion of the early history of the *impresa*. In the opening passage of his treatise *Il dialogo dell'impresa militari et amorosi*, written during the early 1550s and published in Rome in 1555, Giovio cites several antique and contemporary uses of the *impresa*.¹⁹ He does not, as Praz implies, say that the invention of the Italian *impresa* was due to the invasion of Charles VIII and Louis XII into Italy. He merely mentions that, following the French invasion, "everyone in the [Italian] military imitated the French captains, looking to adorn themselves with beautiful and pompous imprese."²⁰ The earliest Italian imprese predate the French invasions by more than half a century.

The latter idea, that the *impresa* reflects the discovery of the *Hieroglyphica*, was first proposed by Karl Giehlow in 1915 and reiterated by Ludwig Volkmann in 1923.²¹ As with many of the Renaissance rediscoveries, it took a long time before the theories outlined and examples provided in the *Hieroglyphica* entered into even the most sophisticated intellectual circles. For even though the text was first reported in Florence in 1419, Ficino seems to have been the first to use it as a philosophical source sometime in the late 1460s. The *Hieroglyphica* itself was not used as a pictorial source until the publication of Francesco Colonna's *Hyperboreomachia Poliphili* in 1499.²² Far from it being the case that the *Hieroglyphica* led to the popularity of the *impresa*, it seems much more likely that the rediscovery of the *Hieroglyphica* was welcomed by humanists precisely because the groundwork for accepting the ideas and images it proposed already had been well established.

Although the *impresa* is defined by sixteenth-century theorists as a two-part *concetto*, composed of an image (the body) and a short motto (the soul), throughout the fifteenth century the *impresa* appears in various forms: as a freestanding motto, a textless image and a combined image and motto. The use of the *impresa* is equally wide-ranging. It can be created as a occasional piece, being invented and used for a specific situation. Louis XII, for example, used the image of a swarm of bees together with the motto "Rex non utitur aculeo" when he entered Genoa in 1502 (see Figure 4.2).²³ Hill was the first to suggest

that the reverse of Pisanello's portrait medal of Leonello d'Este was cast to celebrate his marriage in April 1444 to Maria d'Aragona. The reverse, with its *impresa* of a small putto holding a musical manuscript in front of a lion, was a play on the idea that in this new marriage, Cupid would teach the lion (Leonello) to sing (see Figure 4.3).²⁴

Most often, however, imprese were used as subheraldic personal devices. Leonello's half brother, Borso d'Este, used the symbols of the baptismal font, the wattle fence, and the unicorn dipping its horn into water to purify it as personal imprese throughout his life (see Figure 4.4).²⁵ All three of these imprese have been related to Borso's *impresa* of trying to push back the swampy Po River delta basin and save Ferrara from all such fluvial and, perhaps, political incursions. Isabella d'Este Gonzaga's imprese of the candelabra and the mysterious *impresa delle pause* are also familiar to Renaissance historians. Less familiar, perhaps, is the story that when Mario Equicola presented Isabella with a twenty-seven chapter thesis on the theme of her motto, "Nec spe nec metu," her response was: "I certainly never imagined all these mysteries when I made the little motto!"²⁶

Imprese can also become familial images, such as the Visconti-Sforza image of the muzzled dog, the flaming dove, or the knotted veil (see Figure 4.5) and the Medicean images of the diamond ring. Some might not consider these devices as imprese, but nearly all of them started their life specifically as such, with the corresponding criterion of an expressed aspiration, promise, or *impresa*.²⁷ Furthermore, the process seemed to work both ways. The device of the diamond ring was adopted as a personal *impresa* by Ercole d'Este, though there is evidence that it had been used as a familial *impresa* previously by Niccolò III d'Este. Similarly, the mysterious blindfolded lynx, used by Leonello as a personal *impresa* on the reverse of the bronze medal made by Pisanello sometime between 1441 and 1444 (see Figure 4.6), appears as a heraldic crest on the reverse of the *Portrait of Francesco d'Este* by Rogier van der Weyden (see Figure 4.7). The adoption of Leonello's personal *impresa* may indicate Francesco's wish to overcome his illegitimate status and be recognized as Leonello's legitimate heir.²⁸

It is debatable as to which image might be rightly identified as the first Italian *impresa*. To my mind, however, the two most favored contenders would be the image of the winged eye, which appears on Leon Battista Alberti's self-portrait plaque (see Figure 4.8), and the reverse of the first portrait medal of Leonello d'Este (see Figure 4.9), both of which date to sometime between 1438 and 1444. Regardless of which of these two might claim precedence, both derive from the ambiance of the Ferrarese court. The importance of Alberti's contacts with the Ferrarese intelligentsia in his intellectual development has often been overlooked by Tuscan-centric art historians. His close friendship with Leonello d'Este is well documented, and the two seem to have remained close all their lives.³⁹ Having said that, however, one must admit that we know frustratingly little about the activities of this particularly intense center of humanistic activity, presided over by the famous teacher Guarino da Verona.⁴⁰ It does seem, however, that during the decade in which Leonello ruled the state, the seeds of an earlier, exclusively philological brand of humanism began to take root. The keen interest in antique texts, combined with an almost complete lack of any competing tradition in the visual arts, led the intellectual community in Ferrara toward filling this gap by creating their own pictorial vocabulary. Images were created not by consulting visual sources, but by trying to recreate the past through literary sources. What one finds in Ferrara is what one might truly call "humanist art"—an attitude towards constructing a picture which mirrors the philologist's approach toward the creation of neo-Latin texts. Through the compilation of tropes and literary images (*composizione* in its broadest sense), they strove to embody what they believed to be the best parts of their classical heritage.⁴¹

In most of the current literature, for example, the peculiar three-faced putto on the reverse of Pisanello's portrait medal of Leonello d'Este is identified as an *impresa* toward the virtue of prudence, following arguments set forth by Panofsky and Wind in the 1950s.⁴² But the three-faced putto actually may be the representation of the Muse of epic verse, Calliope, as devised by Guarino da Verona.⁴³ In a letter dated November 5, 1477, Guarino provided Leonello with a series of iconographic formulae for a cycle

of paintings of the Muses intended for his studiolo at Belfiore, which includes this description of Calliope:

Calliope, the seeker out of learning and the guardian of the art of poetry, also provides a voice for the other arts: let her carry a laurel crown and have three faces composed together, since she has set forth the nature of men, heroes and gods.⁴⁴

The presence of the laurel wreath in the medal, therefore, is an indication of the specific nature of the heroic glory immortalized by epic verse. In this light, it is possible to see Leonello's *impresa* as a humanist rephrasing of the French *empire*. The striving toward chivalric glory has been replaced by a quest for a place among the heroes of classical history and myth. This particular "humanist *empire*" reappears regularly in the small circle of Italian humanist princes—nearly two dozen of whom specifically commissioned neo-Latin epic tales in which they were the heroes.⁴⁵ The choice of Calliope as an *impresa* particularly suitable for the Renaissance prince is supported by Hesiod, who says that as the Muse of epic poetry, "she is the most excellent of the sisters, because she is the companion of splendid princes";⁴⁶ and, as Cicero reminds us: "Neque enim quisquam est tam aversus a Musis qui non mandari versibus aeternum suorum laborum facile praeconium patiatur" (For indeed, there is no man to whom the Muses are so distasteful that he will not entrust to poetry the eternal emblazonment of his achievements).⁴⁷

The example set by Guarino's image of Calliope should warn us that in many cases, we are dealing with an *ad hoc* language in the development of the Renaissance *impresa*. These images reflect very well that intermediary stage of the late Quattrocento, when artists had broken free of the tyranny of late medieval models and had not yet succumbed to the blandness of the iconographic handbook developed by the sixteenth-century *trattatisti*, such as Giraldi, Conti, Cartari, and Ripa. Indeed, it could be argued that one of the problems facing artists of the early Quattrocento was "how" to depict certain figures and concepts. In most cases, the medieval models seemed outmoded, while truly classical models were yet to be discovered or recognized. In such a climate, Guarino's *invenzione* of the image of Calliope must have seemed divinely inspired. As the Renaissance matured, however,

these ungainly approximations of the "antique" were discarded and their meanings forgotten. In the immediate cultural milieu of Ferrarese humanism, the triple-faced putto carried a certain amount of iconographical authority. It reappears, in a slightly altered guise, for example, among the figures of the Muses and Liberal Arts in Agostino di Duccio's reliefs in the Tempio Malatestiano built for Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta in Rimini (see Figure 4.10).⁴² The connection between Ferrara and Rimini is twofold: Sigismondo had intellectual links with Ferrara through Alberti (the original architect of the Tempio); and more importantly, Sigismondo's court poet, Basinio da Parma, was first schooled and later taught in Ferrara immediately before coming to Rimini.⁴³ When the image moved farther afield, however, its potency was diminished. When Pisanello made an attempt to reuse Guarino's Calliope for the 1469 medal of Alfonso V of Aragon, it appears to have been rejected (See Figures 4.11 and 4.12).⁴⁴ It is impossible to say whether Pisanello's design was abandoned because it was considered to be too fussy; whether Alfonso had known the image through Pisanello's previous medal and did not wish his own iconography to be too closely connected to that of the Ferrarese prince; or whether, being outside of the main impulse of Guarino's influence, Alfonso was unaffected by the particular genius behind this admittedly ugly figure. Nevertheless, Pisanello must have thought that the conceit fit nicely with the image of a leader who claimed to be both "Triumphator et Pacificus" and "Venator Intrepidus."

Since many of the fifteenth-century *imprese* are, literally, ad hoc creations, twentieth-century scholars can decipher them only as far as their imagery coincides with what information we happen to have inherited from the past. We can easily understand the iconography of the reverse of Cecilia Gonzaga's medal, because we know that the moon and the unicorn are symbols for virginity and also because the legend on the obverse makes it perfectly clear that this is "Cecilia Virgo, filia Iohannes Francisci primi marchionis Mantue" (see Figure 4.13).⁴⁵ The legend LIBERALITAS AUGUSTAE gives us a clue that Alfonso V of Aragon's medal reverse, which shows an eagle distributing its catch among the smaller birds, is an *impresa* for

liberality (see Figure 4.14).⁴⁶ Beyond this, however, many of the meanings we attach to these medal reverses are based on inspired guesswork rather than fact. It seems possible, for example, that one has "cracked the secret" of Leonello d'Este's *impresa* of the blindfolded lynx (Figure 4.6) when one recognizes that the lynx was reputed to have sight so keen that it could see through walls. There is no sense in trying to blindfold a lynx (the *leonello*), because he can see through everything—or as the motto says, "Quae videns, ne vide."⁴⁷ Or to return to Alberti's *impresa* of the winged eye, he himself describes the image as a symbol of God's omniscience.⁴⁸ As an *impresa*, therefore, it might be an *emprise* to remain as vigilant and circumspect as possible, but in Matteo de' Pasti's medal of 1446–50, a wreath and a motto were added to the *impresa*. Alberti describes the wreath as a symbol of joy and glory, and, to this extent, the image functions well as an *impresa* (see Figure 4.15).⁴⁹ The problem lies in the meaning of the accompanying motto: "Quid tum." Wind suggested that the motto was a warning to be prepared for the Day of Judgment;⁵⁰ but this reading undermines the power of the image as an *impresa* and contradicts the sense of the picture. One possible reading for the "Quid tum" might be "What next?"—with the idea that if one were continually striving toward excellence, one would always want to know "Quid tum"—or "What next?"⁵¹ If we are right in assuming that Matteo de' Pasti's medal accurately records Alberti's *impresa*, it seems best to recall the original intent of the *impresa*: to summarize a hope or a desire for the benefit of a specific audience.

It is the specificity of the audience and our limited understanding of the visual vocabulary involved, however, that will preclude our attempts to uncover the significance of many of the *imprese* on fifteenth-century medals. To forget this, as Paolo Giovio warns, "è proprio un entrare in un gran pelago e da non poterne così tosto riuscire."⁵²

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NOTES

An expanded version of some of the arguments presented in this chapter appears in Kristin Lippincott, "The Genesis and Significance of the Fifteenth-Century Italian

Impresa," in *Chivalry in the Renaissance*, ed. S. Anglo (San Francisco, 1990), pp. 49–76. I thank the publishers Boydell and Brewer for allowing me to reconstruct some of the arguments here. The quotation in the title comes from Paolo Giovio and should be taken as a warning for all those interested in deciphering imprese (see P. Giovio, *Dialogo dell'imprese militari et amorose*, ed. M. L. Doglio [Rome, 1978], p. 34).

1. For the most recent study of Vasari and his method, see P. L. Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari: Art and History* (London and New Haven, 1995), which contains a full bibliography of previous studies.
2. On the problems surrounding the readership of Alberti's treatises, for example, see C. Gilbert, "Antique Frameworks for Renaissance Art Theory: Alberti and Pino," *Marsyas*, III (1943–45), pp. 87–106; C. Grayson, "Studi su Leon Battista Alberti," *Rinascimento*, IV (1953), pp. 45–62; C. Westfall, "Painting and the Liberal Arts: Alberti's View," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XXX (1969), pp. 487–506; and K. Lippincott, "Mantegna and the scientia of Painting," in *Art and Life in the Fifteenth-century Italian Courts*, ed. F. Ames-Lewis (London, 1993), pp. 45–55 and 117–19, esp. pp. 50–51.
3. See L. Volkman, *Bilderschriften der Renaissance. Hieroglyphik und Emblematik in ihren Beziehungen und Fortwirkung* (Leipzig, 1923); and M. Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery* (Studies of the Warburg Institute, III [London, 1939]).
4. See Lippincott, "Genesis," pp. 49–50 and the bibliography cited therein.
5. See H. Miedema, "The Term Emblem in Alciati," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXXI (1968), pp. 234–50, esp. p. 238.
6. The definitions are cited from Praz, *Studies*, p. 50; A. Chiocci, *Discorso delle imprese e del vero modo di formarle* (Verona, 1601); and Scipione Ammirato, *Il Rota ovvero dell'Impresa* (Naples, 1562), pp. 10–14 ("...una significazione della mente nostra sotto un nodo di parole e di cose...una filosofia del cavaliere, come la poesia e una filosofia del filosofo").
7. "...Ch'ella non sia oscura di sorte ch'abbia mestiero della sibilla per interpretare a volerla intendere, né tanto chiara ch'ogni plebeo l'intenda." Giovio, *Dialogo dell'imprese*, p. 37.
8. See M. Pastoureaux, *Figures et couleurs: Études sur la symbolique et la sensibilité médiévales* (Paris, 1986), esp. pp. 35–49; and M. Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven and London, 1984), pp. 130–32.
9. For a discussion of some of the different kinds of allegiances proclaimed through personal and familial arms, see Lippincott, *Genesis*, pp. 58–59.
10. R. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1980), pp. 218–19.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 343.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 342–45.
13. Cited from J. Burckhardt, *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien: Ein Versuch* (the citation is taken from *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, ed. and trans. S. G. C. Middlemore [London and New York, 1929], p. 357).
14. See M. Pastoureaux, "Aux origines de l'emblème: La crise de la héraldique européenne aux XV^e et XVI^e siècles," *Emblèmes et Devises au Temps de la Renaissance*, ed. M. T. Jones-Davies (Paris, 1981), pp. 129–38, esp. pp. 130–31.
15. For additional information, see C. Enlart, *Manuel d'archéologie française depuis les temps mérovingiens jusqu'à la Renaissance. III. Le costume* (Paris, 1916), p. 424.
16. For a convenient overview of the "chivalric component" of renaissance life, see A. Scaglione, *Knights at Court: Courtliness, Chivalry, and Courtesy from Ottonian Germany to the Renaissance* (Berkeley, CA, 1991).
17. For a list of illustrations, see the sources cited in Lippincott, *Genesis*, p. 63.
18. Cited by F. Ames-Lewis, "Early Medicean Devices," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XLII (1979), pp. 122–43, esp. p. 123, n. 6 ("E fu lui con una brigata di giovani vestiti delle livree di lei, cioppette pagonazze ricamate di belle parole."). It should be noted, however, that Guasti reads "perle" for "parole" in A. Macinghi negli Strozzi, *Lettere d'una gentil donna fiorentina del secolo XV ai figliuoli esuli*, ed. C. Guasti (Florence, 1877), p. 575. If Guasti's reading is correct, then the tunics of Lorenzo's companions were covered with pearls, and not words.
19. See Praz, *Studies*, pp. 47–48.
20. "Ma a questi nostri tempi, dopo la venuta del re Carlo VIII e di Lodovico XII in Italia, ognuno che seguiva la milizia, imitando i capitani francesi, cercò di adornarsi di belli e pompose imprese, delle quali riluceno i cavalieri, appartati compagnia da compagnia con diverse livree, perciò che ricamavano d'argento, di martel dorato i saioni." See Giovio, *Dialogo dell'imprese*, pp. 36–37.
21. See Karl Giehlow, "Die Hieroglyphen des Humanismus in der Allegorie der Renaissance, besonders der Ehrenpforte Kaisers Maximilian," *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen der allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, XXI (1915), pp. 1–232, esp. pp. 28–40; and Volkman, *Bilderschriften der Renaissance*, pp. 10–28. For additional bibliography on the continuation of this idea, see Lippincott, *Genesis*, p. 64, n. 58. Even Klein states that the Italian impresa evolved from "the expressive images of the Quattrocento, the hieroglyphs and the allegories" (see R. Klein, "La théorie de l'expression figurée dans les traités italiens sur les imprese, 1555–1612," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et Renaissance*, XIX [1957], pp. 320–40, rep. in R. Klein, *La forme et l'intelligible: Écrits sur la Renaissance et l'art moderne*, ed. A. Chastel [Paris, 1970], pp. 125–50).
22. See the notation in Ficino's manuscript in the Biblioteca Laurenziana, Ms. Plut. 69, cod. 27, cited by Giehlow, *Die Hieroglyphen*, pp. 12 and 22–24. Colonna seems to have been working on his text of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* as early as 1467, but this still postdates the appearance of the impresa

- in Italy by nearly three decades. For additional citation of the use of "hieroglyphs" in fifteenth-century art and literature, see Lippincott, *Genesis*, pp. 64–65, and E. H. Gombrich, "Hypnerotomachiana," *Symbolic Images: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, II (London, 1972), pp. 102–8.
23. Cited by D. Russell, *The Emblem and Device in France* (Lexington, KY, 1985), p. 32 and fig. 6 (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms fr. 5091, fol. 15R). See also Russell's discussion of the "devise en veuue" used "to express devotion to a spouse, and especially in times of mourning and widowhood" (p. 27).
 24. G. F. Hill, *A Corpus of Italian Medals before Cellini* (London, 1930), p. 10, no. 32. See also E. Corradini's entry on the medal in *Le Muse e il Principe: Arte di corte nel Rinascimento padano*, exh. cat., Milan, Museo Poldi Pezzoli, September 20–December 1 (Milan, 1991), Catalogo, p. 69; and Stephen K. Scher's entry in *The Currency of Fame: Portrait Medals of the Renaissance* (New York, 1994), pp. 47–50.
 25. Relatively little has been written about Borsio's imprese. For the most recent discussions, see the various catalogue entries in *Le Muse e il Principe* (as in n. 25, above), Catalogo, pp. 70–72, 76–84, and 190–93; and the illustration from the *Bibbia di Borsio d'Este* (Modena, Biblioteca Estense, Ms X. G. 12 = lat. 422 fol. 110R), in the article by G. M. Canova, "La committenza dei codici miniati alla corte estense al tempo di Leonello e Borsio," in *Le Muse e il Principe*, Saggi, pp. 87–117; and in G. Treccani degli Alfieri, *La Bibbia di Borsio d'Este* (Milan, 1942). [Ed. note: see also the recent article on the imprese of Borsio d'Este in Roberta Iotti, ed., *Gli Estensi: Parte I, La Corte di Ferrara* (Modena, 1997).]
 26. See A. Luzio and R. Renier, "La coltura e le relazioni letterarie di Isabella d'Este Gonzaga," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, XXXIII (1899), pp. 1–62, esp. pp. 49–52; I. L. Mumford, "Some Decorative Aspects of the Imprese of Isabella d'Este (1474–1539)," *Italian Studies*, XXXIV (1979), pp. 60–70; and J. Cartwright, *Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua, 1474–1539: A Study of the Renaissance*, 3rd ed. (London, 1904), I, pp. 279–82.
 27. For a list of the Visconti-Sforza imprese, see L. Beltrami, *Il Castello di Milano sotto il dominio dei Visconti e degli Sforza MCCCLXVIII–MDXXXV* (Milan, 1894), pp. 706–25; and G. Mongeri, "Il Castello di Milano," *Archivio storico lombardo*, ser. II, I (anno II) (1884), pp. 457–60.
 28. For a reproduction, see *Le Muse ed il principe*, Saggi, p. 34. See also E. Kantorowicz, "The Este Portrait by Roger van der Weyden," *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, III (1939–40), pp. 165–80.
 29. For Alberti's connections with Ferrara during the reign of Leonello d'Este, see M. Baxandall, "A Dialogue on Art from the Court of Leonello d'Este. Angelo Decembrio's *De politica litteraria Pars LXVII*," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXVI (1963), pp. 304–26, esp. pp. 306–9.
 30. For references, see Lippincott, *Genesis*, pp. 66–67, n. 73.
 31. See the arguments put forward in Kristin Lippincott, "The Iconography of the *Salone dei Mesi* and the Study of Latin Grammar in Fifteenth-Century Ferrara," in *La corte di Ferrara e il suo mecenatismo, 1441–1598*, ed. M. Pade, L. Waage Petersen, and D. Quarta (Modena, 1990), pp. 93–109.
 32. The interpretation was based on a passage from the pseudo-Senecan *De virtutibus*, in which the tripartite spirit of prudence is described: "Si prudens es, animus tuus tribus temporibus dispensetur: praesentia ordina, futura praevide, praeterita recordare." See *Martini Episcopi Braconensis opera omnia*, ed. C. W. Barlow (New Haven, 1950), p. 240; and H. Haselbach, *Sénèque des III vertus: La Formula honestae vitae de Martin de Braga (pseudo-Sénèque) traduite et glossée par Jean Courtecuisse (1402)* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1975), p. 382. Haselbach suggests provide for praevide. See also E. Panofsky, "Titian's *Allegory of Prudence: A Postscript*," *Meaning and the Visual Arts* (Garden City, NY), 1955, pp. 146–68; and E. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (London, 1958), p. 45, n. 1.
 33. See Lippincott, *Genesis*, pp. 67–69, citing A. K. Eörsi, "Lo studiolo di Lionello d'Este e il programma di Guarino da Verona," *Acta Historiae Artium Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, XXI (1975), pp. 15–52; M. Baxandall, "Guarino, Pisanello and Manuel Chrysoloras," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXVIII (1965), pp. 183–204; and C. King, "Mnemosyne and Calliope in the 'Chapel of the Muses,' San Francesco, Rimini," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, LI, (1988), pp. 186–87. More recently, see the catalogue entry on this medal in *Le Muse e il Principe*, Catalogo, pp. 64–65, and on Guarino's letter, *ibid.*, pp. 158–61 and the entry in *Pisanello: Le peintre aux sept vertus*, exh. cat., Musée du Louvre, Paris, May 6–August 5, 1996 (Paris, 1996), pp. 383–92, nos. 261 and 262.
 34. English translation taken from Baxandall, "Guarino, Pisanello, and Manuel Chrysoloras," p. 189.
 35. For a list of the neo-Latin epics commissioned by Renaissance princes, see Kristin Lippincott, "The Neo-Latin Historical Epics of the North Italian Courts: An examination of 'Courtly Culture' in the Fifteenth Century," *Renaissance Studies*, III, no. 4 (1989), pp. 415–28, esp. pp. 427–18, n. 5.
 36. Hesiod, *Theogony*, 79. Cited by Eörsi (in Lippincott, *Genesis*), pp. 43 and 52, n. 117.
 37. Cicero, *Pro Archia poeta*, IX, 20. Cited from the Loeb Classical Library, ed. and trans. W. H. Watts (London and New York, 1923), pp. 28–29. A second depiction of the triple-faced putti has recently been discovered in the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara under later frescoes and is datable to the period of the minor reconstruction of the interior of the palazzo under Leonello. For a reproduction and short discussion, see A. M. Visser Travaglia, *Palazzo Schifanoia e Palazzina Marfisa a Ferrara* (Milan, 1991), pp. 22 and 24.
 38. As was first noted by Eörsi (Lippincott, *Genesis*), pp. 43 and 52, n. 117, the figure in the Chapel of the Muses is not Filosofia, an identification first proposed by Corrado Ricci in 1924 (in *Il Tempio Malatestiano* [Milan and Rome, 1924]) and, surprisingly, repeated by Claudia Cieri Via in numerous articles (see

- the bibliography provided in *Le Muse e il Principe*, pp. 476-77) and Corradini (in *Le Muse e il Principe*, p. 65), but she is clearly Guarino's figure of Calliope, the Muse of epic verse.
39. See I. Affò, "Notizie intorno la vita e le opere di Basinio Basini," in *Basini Parmensis poetae opera praestantiora nunc primum edita et opportunis commentariis illustrata*, ed. L. Drudi (Rimini, 1794), II, pp. 3-42.
40. Compare the drawing formerly attributed to Pisanello, but now widely considered to be a workshop production (inv. 2307, Département des Arts Graphiques, Musée du Louvre, Paris). For a discussion of the relationship between the drawing and the final medal, see M. Fossi Todorow, *I disegni del Pisanello e della sua cerchia* (Florence, 1966), pp. 118-19, no. 160; Stephen K. Scher, "Pisanello's Drawings and Medals," in *Designs on Posterity: Drawings for Medals*, ed. M. Jones (London, 1994), pp. 27-46, esp. pp. 42-43, fig. 21; and L. Syson, "The Circulation of Drawings for Medals in fifteenth century Italy," in *Designs on Posterity: Drawings for Medals*, ed. M. Jones (London, 1994), pp. 10-26, esp. pp. 17-23. In the recent Louvre catalogue (*Pisanello: Le peintre*), the drawing is attributed to Pisanello (see pp. 435-97, no. 301).
41. For an illustration and description, see Hill (*Corpus*), p. 11, no. 37; and Scher, *The Currency of Fame*, pp. 52-53.
42. See Hill, *Corpus*, p. 12, no. 41.
43. On the lynx as a symbol of keen sight, see C. Nordenfalk, "Les cinq sens dans l'art du Moyen-âge," *Revue de l'art*, XXXIV (1976), pp. 17-28. The image of the blindfolded lynx also appears on the reverse of the medal by Amadeo da Milano reproduced by Syson (see Syson, "The Circulation of Drawings," p. 16, fig. 12).
44. *Leonis Baptistae Alberti Opera inedita et pauca separatim impressa*, ed. G. Mancini (Florence, 1890), pp. 224-35, esp. pp. 229-30.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries*, pp. 186-88.
47. This reading is similar to that proposed by Douglas Lewis in his entry on Alberti's medal in Scher, *The Currency of Fame*, esp. pp. 42-43 and p. 375, n. 6. I would be slightly less charitable than Lewis has been regarding the psychoanalytic interpretations of this image offered by L. Schneider, "Leon Battista Alberti: Some Biographical Implications of the Winged Eye," *The Art Bulletin*, LXXII (1990), pp. 261-70. See also the entries on the image of the winged eye in *Le Muse e il Principe*, Catalogo, pp. 166-67 and 172-73. One might also cite the combination of "Quid tum" with an eagle in the dedication manuscript of Alberti's work in *volgare* (Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Ms II.IV.38), cited by R. Watkins in "L. B. Alberti's Emblem, the Winged Eye, and His Name, Leo," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorisches Instituts in Florenz*, IX (1959-60), pp. 256-58, esp. p. 256; and in Corradini's entry in *Le Muse e il Principe*, p. 166.
48. See Giovio, *Dialogo dell'impresa*.

FIGURES

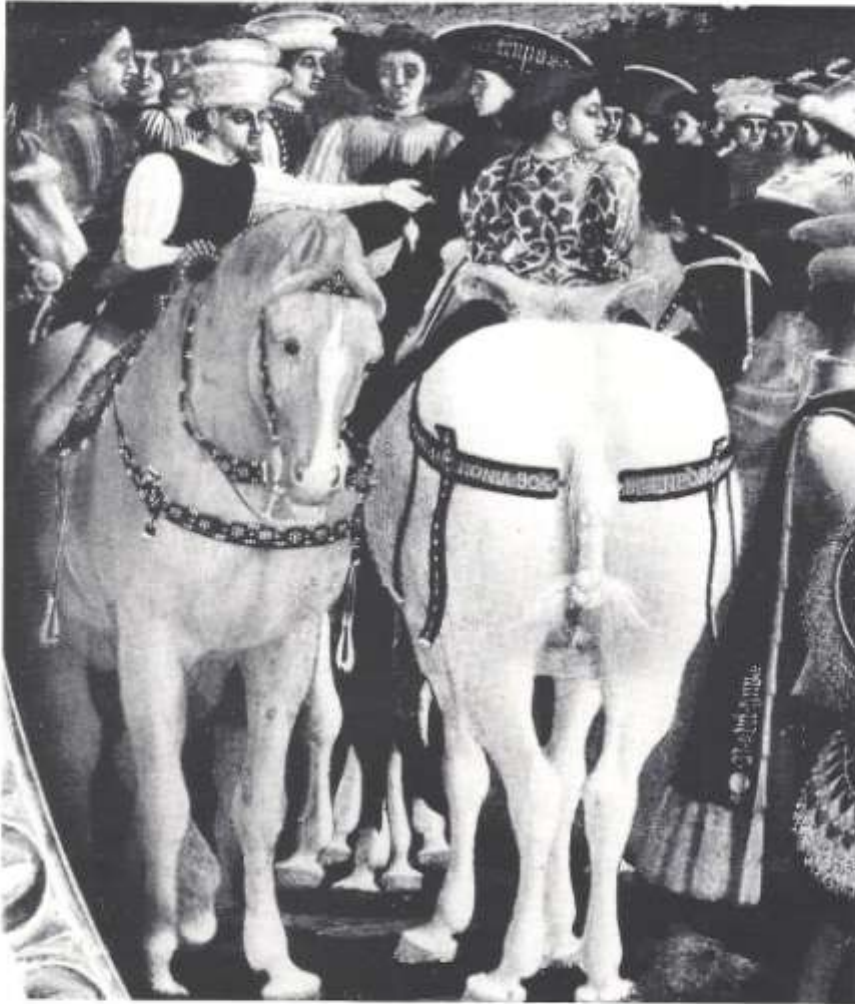


Figure 4.1 Domenico Veneziano: *Adoration of the Magi*.
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.



Figure 4.2 Louis XII and his beehive impresa. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS Fr. 5091, Fol. 15r.



Figure 4.3 Pisanello: Portrait medal of Leonello d'Este (reverse), 100.5 mm diameter, bronze, 1444. Samuel H. Kress Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Photograph by John Bigelow Taylor.



4

Figure 4.4 Borso d'Este's impresa of the unicorn and the wattle fence (detail), from Bible of Borso d'Este. Biblioteca Estense, Modena, MS X.G.12 - Lat. Y22, Fol. 110r.



Figure 4.5 Stemmata of Galeazzo Maria Sforza. Österreichisches Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, MS Vinidob, 1856, Fol. 11.



6

Figure 4.6 Pisanello: Portrait medal of Leonello d'Este, 68.5 mm diameter, bronze, c. 1445. Museo Civico Archeologico, Bologna.



7

Figure 4.7 Rogier van der Weyden: *Portrait of Francesco d'Este (reverse)*. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

8



Figure 4.8 Leon Battista Alberti: Self-portrait plaque, 201 × 135.5 mm, bronze, c. 1435. Samuel H. Kress Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Photograph by John Bigelow Taylor.



Figure 4.9 Pisanello: Portrait medal of Leonello d'Este (reverse), 69 mm diameter, lead, c. 1435. Scher Collection. Photograph by Stephen K. Scher.

9

Figure 4.10 Agostino da Duccio: Relief of Calliope. Tempio Malatestiano, Chapel of the Muses and Liberal Arts, Rimini.



10



Figure 4.11 Pisanello workshop: Designs for a portrait medal of Alfonso V of Aragon, c. 1450. Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Figure 4.15 Matteo de' Pasti: Portrait medal of Leon Battista Alberti (reverse), 93 mm diameter, bronze, 1446-50. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.