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'Grammatica': From Martianus Capella to Hogarth

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of Time, known to Ripa through the interpretation of Macrobius, signifies that "Consiglio" is gained by the contemplation of past, present and future things.<sup>1</sup> The last strange symbol of Ripa's description, the heart on a chain round the neck of the old man, indicates that 'Good Counsel' springs always from the heart.

All these symbols are literally illustrated in the woodcut accompanying Ripa's text (Pl. 17b). A comparison with our picture reveals how largely the artist has freed himself from the tyranny of an erudite, intentionally intricate and secret language of symbols in which elements of late antiquity and scholasticism are fused. He leaves out most of the enigmatic and confusing accessories of Ripa's figure, reducing them to two expressive details: the book and the three-headed figure, with the meaning of which educated people of the 17th century were certainly acquainted. He transforms the symbol of the heart in a very personal manner, by showing a boy who listens to 'Good Counsel' coming from the heart of the old man.<sup>2</sup>

This configuration seems to have been suggested by a motive of Christian iconography, the youthful apostle John leaning on Christ's breast. It alludes to the ideal relation between the master and the disciple who abandons himself entirely to the teachings of supreme wisdom.

It is characteristic that the painter drew his inspiration from those passages of Ripa which allowed a realistic approach, and at the same time found a way of alluding to the Christian code. Although he almost completely neglected Ripa's learned and esoteric suggestions, his intention remained didactic and moralising. This is indicated by the peculiar self-consciousness with which the two figures act their scene and address the spectator in order to tell him that they stand for a moral idea which should appeal to everybody's attention.

LOTHAR FREUND

<sup>1</sup> The story of this symbol and its special function as an attribute in Ripa fully developed in Panofsky, *Herkules am Scheidewege*. 1930, p. 29 ff.

<sup>2</sup> There are also passages in Ripa which suggest the introduction of the young man: "i giovani si devono rimettere al Consiglio de vecchi," "L'età giovanile è proportionata ad obbedire, e l'età senile al comandare," etc.

'GRAMMATICA' :  
FROM MARTIANUS CAPELLA  
TO HOGARTH

The Catalogue of Pictures exhibited in Spring Gardens in 1761 was rapidly sold out. The reason for this success was the topical appeal of its frontispiece and tailpiece designed by Hogarth<sup>3</sup> (Pl. 18e, f). The frontispiece expresses hope in the patronage of the young king, George III, who had ascended the throne in the previous year. This meaning is made evident by a quotation from Juvenal on a reprint of the engraving: "Et spes et ratio studiorum in Caesare tantum."<sup>4</sup>

The imagery of Hogarth's design is somewhat far fetched. The engraving shows a fountain, with a heraldic lion's head and a bust of the king, built into the rock. A stream of water flows from it into a watering-can with which Britannia waters three green trees labelled "painting," "sculpture," "architecture." By a witty contrast the tailpiece shews three dead stumps of trees in flower-pots being uselessly watered by a monkey, who watches the success of his activity through a magnifying-glass. The labels "obit 1502, obit 1600, obit 1604" illustrate the vain endeavour of this ape to revive what has been dead for hundreds of years. This is a satire on the folly of the connoisseurs who turn towards the "exoticks" of "those old and damaged pictures which are venerated merely for their antiquity."<sup>5</sup> Again in the reprint a passage from Martial elucidates the idea: "Esse quid hoc dicam vivis quod fama negatur?"

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Paradoxical as it may sound, Hogarth got the inspiration for his engravings exactly from that ancient art which he himself condemned as dead. His design belongs to a pictorial tradition which can be traced back to an engraving by Marc Antonio (Pl. 17c).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> John Ireland, *A Supplement to Hogarth Illustrated*, 1804, III, pp. 93-97.

<sup>4</sup> All the reprints enumerated in: E. Hawkins, *Catalogue of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*, IV, 1883, no. 3808, 3809.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. John Ireland, *op. cit.*, where a more detailed analysis of the prints can be found. In the same year 1761 Hogarth challenged the connoisseurs by painting his *Sigismunda*, for which the engraving 'Time blackening a picture' served as a subscription ticket. Cf. J. B. Nichols, *Anecdotes of W. Hogarth*, 1872, p. 299.

<sup>6</sup> Bartsch, *Peintre-Graveur* XIV, p. 292, no. 383. Giovan Antonio da Brescia copied Marc Antonio's engraving. (B. XIII, p. 329, no. 21.) Cf. also Pordenone's fresco in the cloister of S. Stefano, Venice (before 1532). Phot. Alinari 38757.



a—'Good Counsel.' Italian, 17th century. Private Coll. (p. 81)



b—'Consiglio.' Ripa, *Iconologia*, 1613 (p. 82)



c—Marc Antonio, 'Grammar.' Engraving (p. 82)



d—'Grammar'. Italian engraving (*Tarocchi*) (p. 83)



a—'Grammar'. C. Ripa, *Iconologia*, French ed., 1644 (p. 84)



b—Bourdon, 'Grammar'. Engraving (p. 84)



c—'Grammar'. C. Ripa, *Iconologia*, German ed., 1760 (p. 84)



d—La Hire, 'Grammar'. 1650. Private Coll. (p. 84)



e, f—Hogarth, Frontispiece and Tailpiece of Catalogue, Spring Gardens Exhibition, 1767 (p. 82)

It shows an almost naked woman of Gorgonesque type<sup>1</sup> watering a flower. This enigmatic motive can be explained with the help of the literary tradition. It is a symbol of 'Grammatica.' As the plant grows through watering so the young mind is formed through the study of grammar. In late antiquity grammar became the foundation of the liberal arts. We can trace this doctrine from Martianus Capella and Cassiodorus to Isidorus, Rabanus Maurus and right through the later Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup> Out of a long series of authors we quote a characteristic passage from John of Salisbury's *Metalogicus* (finished 1159), a work which deals at length with problems of education :

Grammar is the science of talking and writing correctly and the origin of all the liberal arts. It is the cradle of all philosophy and so to speak the chief nourisher of all literary studies.<sup>3</sup>

Plutarch more than once compares in a general way the growth and watering of a plant with the education of youth.<sup>4</sup> And a Latin author of the 1st century A.D., Petronius Arbiter, in talking about the restoration of the old noble style of oratory recommends that "studiosi iuvenes lectione severa irrigarentur."<sup>5</sup>

A writer of the early Middle Ages, Bishop

Theodulf of Orleans (died 821), in his poem "De septem liberalibus artibus in quadam pictura depictis" applies this idea directly to Grammar. She is described as sitting at the foot of a tree, accompanied by Rhetorica and Dialectica, whilst the Quadrivium appears in the branches. And it is she who has the power to make the tree grow.<sup>6</sup>

The name of Melanchthon is enough to remind us of the important position held by grammar during the Renaissance. Liberated from scholastic fetters it keeps its central position in a more realistic system of education. Grammar appears now again under the old simile of the root without which the tree of science cannot grow. Celio Calcagnini, a contemporary of Marc Antonio, expresses this with the words "Quando nec sine radice ullae diu arbores possunt supervivere : Ita sine hac (sc. grammatica) nullae bonae institutiones possunt adolescere."<sup>7</sup>

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While these texts explain the attribute of the watering-jug in Marc Antonio's engraving, we have yet to account for the vessel in the figure's right hand. A similar vessel is held by 'Grammatica' in the so-called Mantegna Tarocchi (Pl. 17d).<sup>8</sup> This print is a literal illustration of Martianus Capella's description of 'Grammatica'<sup>9</sup> whom he presents as an old woman carrying a vessel which is supposed to contain medicine for correcting the children's pronunciation and a knife for sharpening their defective tongues. She also holds a file, with which the grammatical mistakes can be removed. Though the widespread influence of Capella is well known, it has not been noticed that his prescription is still followed in the 'Grammatica' of the Tarocchi, a series of engravings which was certainly known to Marc Antonio. Thus the vessel in the hand of his Venus-like 'Grammatica' appears to be a survival of the drug-jar of Martianus Capella.

In his *Iconologia* Cesare Ripa describes 'Grammatica' with both file and watering-jug as attributes, but he leaves out the vessel. Like Marc Antonio, he combines the watering theme from Plutarch with only one of the motives from Martianus Capella. In the 17th century illustrations accompanying Ripa's

<sup>1</sup> Cf. G. M. Richter, *Giorgio da Castelfranco*, 1937, p. 259, no. 108.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Gabriel Meier, "Die sieben freien Künste im Mittelalter." *Jahresber. über die Lehr- und Erziehungs-Anstalt des Benediktiner-Stiftes Maria-Einsiedeln*, 1885-6, p. 3ff.; Appuhn, *Das Trivium*, 1900; on the scholastic movement against the traditional system of the liberal arts, cf. Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa*, 1898, II, p. 712 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Migne, *Patr. Lat.*, vol. 199, col. 840.

In astrological systems we sometimes find Grammar associated with Sol and with gold, the most precious metal (e.g. in a German MS. of the 15th century in Tübingen, cod. M.d. 2, f. 320 v. Cf. A. Hauber, *Planetenkinderbilder und Sternbilder*, 1916, p. 223). In other cases she appears as a sower (e.g. in a 15th century woodcut from Nuremberg), or as the charioteer of the liberal arts. Cf. MS. Salzburg no. 53, f. 242 r. Cf. *Beschr. Verzeichnis der illuminierten Handschr. in Osterreich*, II. H. Tietze, "Die Handschr. in Salzburg," 1905, p. 60; and a corresponding woodcut of the 15th century from Nürnberg. In Alanus de Insulis *Anticlaudianus* (12th century) 'Grammatica' constructs the shaft of the carriage of 'Prudentia' (Migne, *P.L.* 210, col. 206).

<sup>4</sup> In *De liberis educandis*, e.g. chap. 9 (transl. Loeb Class. Libr.) : "Just as plants are nourished by moderate applications of water, but are drowned by many in succession, in the same fashion the mind is made to grow by properly adapted tasks, but is submerged by those which are excessive."

<sup>5</sup> *Satyricon*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Migne, *P. L.* 105, col. 333.

<sup>7</sup> "Oratio sive encomion Artium Liberalium." In *Opera aliquot*, 1544, p. 553.

<sup>8</sup> A. M. Hind, *Early Italian Engravings. A critical Catalogue*, 1938, Pl. 340, no. E. 21, b.

<sup>9</sup> Liber III, 221 ff. Cf. also Corpet, *Annales Archéologiques* XVII, 1857, pp. 92-3.

text the symbol of Martianus Capella is not shewn, the watering of the flower becoming the chief motive of the allegory. And the same applies to later iconologists.<sup>1</sup>

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Bourdon's engraving of 'Grammatica' (Pl. 18b)<sup>2</sup> is evidently based on the French edition of Ripa of 1644 (Pl. 18a).<sup>3</sup> Her right hand rests on a ribbon similar to that which in Ripa's woodcut bears the inscription: "vox litterata et articulata debito modo pronunciata." The same source provides also the key for a painting by La Hire, dated 1650 (Pl. 18d).<sup>4</sup> Here 'Grammatica' is equipped with the ribbon on which the passage from Ripa is conspicuously inscribed. But there is one curious feature which cannot be explained simply from Ripa's text: La Hire painted two flower-pots.

Ripa's Latin definition of Grammar derives from ancient grammarians. Almost every later grammarian followed the standard *Ars Grammatica* of Donatus (4th century A.D.) in subdividing Grammar into the two parts: "vox" and "littera."<sup>5</sup> But "littera" depends

for its existence on "vox articulata"; for 'Words' can be either articulate or confused, and the 'Letter' is the smallest part of the articulate word. Priscianus, the famous grammarian of the imperial court in Constantinople, contracts this definition into the passage:

Vocis differentiae sunt quattuor: articulata, inarticulata, litterata, illiterata.<sup>6</sup>

La Hire seems to have intended the two flower-pots as illustrations of the two positive parts of this definition. If this is true, La Hire must have known, besides Ripa, original texts of grammarians, for Ripa's text alone would not suggest so clear a division of the subject. One need not be surprised at La Hire's erudition. He was quite likely to have come upon this definition in one of the innumerable editions of Latin grammarians published in the 17th century.

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To return to Hogarth: it cannot be doubted that he knew allegories of 'Grammatica' from Iconologies (Pl. 18c). His substitution is quite logical. In his frontispiece, Britannia is fulfilling the task of 'Grammatica.' She is responsible for the young shoots of art as Grammar is responsible for the forming of youth's mind. In the tail-piece, the rôle of Grammar is usurped by the antiquarian who, in the character of an ape, performs a parody of education.

R. W.

<sup>1</sup> As an example may be quoted the famous late *Iconologie* by Gravelot and Cochin (1796?), II, no. 85.

<sup>2</sup> The engraving was made after a lost grisaille, which belonged to a series painted for M. de Bretonvilliers in 1663. Cf. *Mém. inédits des membres de l'Académie Royale*, 1887, I, p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> J. Baudoin, *Iconologie, ou explication nouvelle des plusieurs images, tirée de C. Ripa*, I, no. 72.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Mém. inédits, op. cit.*, p. 107, and Catalogue of the *Chefs d'Œuvre de l'Art Français*, Paris, 1937, no. 80. A piece of a series for M. Tallemant, (formerly Seligmann Paris).

<sup>5</sup> This division can be traced back to the Stoa. Cf. Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie*, VII, col. 1802 ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Grammatici Latini*, ed. H. Keil, II, p. 5.