

Russian connections in the emblem book of Hermanus van den Burg (1682-1752)¹

Ton Broos

Hermanus van den Burg (1682-1752) is known in Dutch literature for his rivalry with his fellow journalist Jacob Campo Weyerman (1677-1747). In 1743, however, he published a collection of 840 emblemata, a picture with a text, which were dedicated to Czar Peter the Great. The czar's stay in Holland had stimulated emblemata literature, as evidenced by the Russian edition of *Symbola et emblemata* in 1705. Van den Burg copied from this, but also from French examples. This popular genre inspired international artists and poets, and Dutch editions in particular flourished in the 17th and 18th centuries. A few examples show the similarities and the intention of Van den Burg, who wanted to combine the useful with the pleasant and entertain his readers. The article concludes with an incident in which Russian connections stand out.

Key terms: Hermanus van den Burg; Czar Peter the Great's visit to Holland; emblems; Dutch emblematic literature; *Verzameling van uitgekorene zinspreuken en zinnebeeldige print-vercieringen*; *Symbola et emblemata*.

1. Introduction

Jacob Bicker Raije, eyewitness and narrator of Amsterdam events, wrote in his chronicle in 1752 about Hermanus van den Burg, who had died on February 10:

¹ This is the extended version of my presentation for CAANS 2015 held in Ottawa on May 30, 2015. A shorter Dutch version, entitled *De belerende vinger van Hermanus van den Burg* ('Hermanus van den Burg's pedantic finger-wagging') was published in *Mededelingen van de Stichting Jacob Campo Weyerman*, volume 41, issue 2, Winter 2018, 109-121.

Harmanus van den Burgh moet een groot poeet geweest zijn en een seer verstandig karel, die zijn bequaemhijt veeltijts ten nadeele van sijnselvs gebruykte. Sijnde wel ses maal welhebbent en dan weer een arm man geweest, met 12 ambachten en 13 ongelukken.

(Beijerinck & De Boer 1935, 204)²

It was Hermanus' fate as a hack writer to have to live off his pen, which made for ups and downs in his life, which began in 1682, in Amsterdam on *Haarlemmerdijk* ('a famous street in Amsterdam'). He started writing poetry as a teenager and was a member of a chamber of rhetoric or *Rederijkerskamer*, 'a poets' club'. Poetry, spontaneous or on assignment, was part of his vast repertoire, which included farces, weekly satirical journals, and pamphlets. However, revenues from his writing must have varied greatly, so he had a steadier job as a cotton trader, and he also owned a tavern on *Overtoom*, an important artery in Amsterdam. We have a description of an inebriated Hermanus reciting his poetry standing on a table in his tavern (De Blauw 1985, 233-258; De Blauw 1977, 5-35; De Blauw 1976-1977, 332-335; De Vet 2014, 129-144).

Although I will return to some of his other literary works, the focus here is on a publication that mixes pictures with text, *een plaatje met een praattie* ('a picture with a lecture'). It was published in 1743 by Johannes Marshoorn in Haarlem entitled *Verzameling van uitgekorene zin-spreuken en zinnebeeldige print-vercieringen* ('Collection of selected mottos and emblematic printed decorations') (Van den Burg 1743).³ The work is part of the so-called emblematic genre that was popular in the 16th and 17th, less so in the 18th, century. Emblems usually have three elements: a short saying as a motto, a picture, and a subscript. Van den Burg's edition has a title, a subscript in different languages, a two-line verse or distich, and six pictures on the opposite page with corresponding numbers. As will be clear later, it turns out that only a limited part of this collection was from Van den Burg's own hand.

² Hermanus van den Burg must have been a great poet and a very smart guy, who used his skills often to his disadvantage, having been well-off six times and then a poor man again, with 12 trades and 13 accidents, or a jack-of-all-trades and master of none.

³ I gratefully acknowledge that I used the copy in my possession, inherited from Martijn Zwart, translator of Dutch poetry, anthologized in Martijn Zwart's *Dutch poetry in translation: Kaleidoscope*, published in 1998 by Fairfield Books.

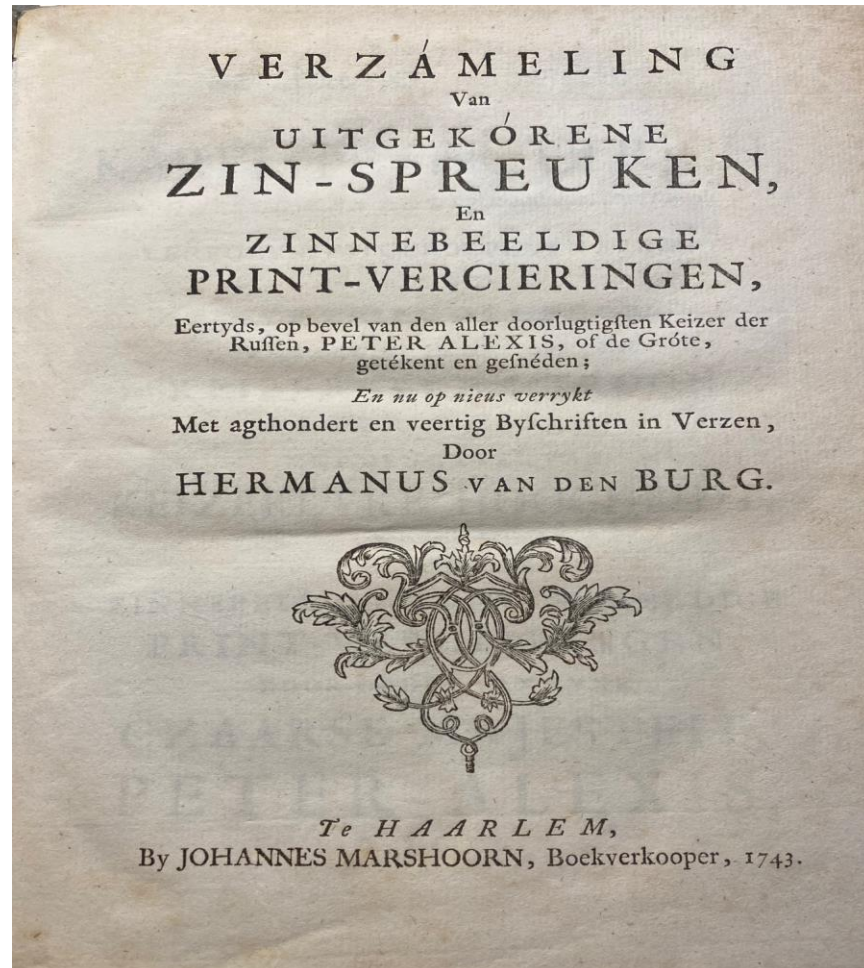


Figure 1. Title page of *Verzameling van uitgekorene zin-spreuken en zinnebeeldige print-vercieringen*, Hermanus van den Burg, 1743. This work is in the public domain.

2. Honoring the czar

The title page informs us that:

Eertyds, op bevel van den aller doorlugtigsten Keizer der Russen, PETER ALEXIS, of de Grote, getekent en gesneden; en nu op nieuw verrykt met agthondert en veertig Byschriften in Verzen door Hermanus van den BURG.
 (Van den Burg 1743, sp)⁴

⁴ Erewhile drawn and engraved at the command of the most illustrious emperor of the Russians, PETER ALEXIS, or the Great; and now again enriched with eight hundred and forty captions in rhyme by Hermanus van den Burg.



Figure 2. Portrait of Czar Peter the Great in Verzameling van uitgekorene zin-spreuken en zinnebeeldige print-vercieringen, Hermanus van den Burg, 1743. This work is in the public domain.

Peter the Great, portrayed by Godfrey Kneller, engraved by Joseph Mulder, decorates the title print. He is surrounded by emblems with slogans, and he gets an exuberant tribute:

Dit 's 't Beeldt des Grootsten Mans die Moskou immer zag, Die, in zyn Landt, den Nagt des breins herschiep in dag; De drieste onwetenheidt ten Ryk' heeft uitgedreven, De grootste Helden van zyn leeftydt heeft doen beven: En, zo gy weten wilt wat wonderen Hy deedt? Men vraag', 't gene ik niet kan uitdrukken, Turk en Zweedt. 't Is Keizer PETER, dien de Grote wordt geheten, En wiens verdiensten nooit Europa kan vergeten; Zyn wonder-glory

staat Griek en Romein in 't ligt, En 't magtig Ruslandt is zyn grootheid Hem verpligt.
(Van den Burg 1743, sp)⁵

It is remarkable, however, that Peter the Great had already died in 1725! The dedication on the next page is presumably therefore aimed at his imperial highness Karel Peter Ulrich, Duke of Holstein Gottorp, who in the fall of 1742 at the age of fourteen was indeed proclaimed the heir presumptive to the Russian throne. However, if the author and publisher had counted on some imperial recognition, they would have put their money on the wrong horse. Charles Peter became Czar Peter III for only six months in 1762. He had the misfortune of having married Catharine the Great, who likely had him assassinated in that same year. She was, incidentally, the first Russian monarch to annex the Crimea (De Vet 2014, 137).⁶

3. *Symbola et emblemata* (1705)

The fact that the title page mentions that the czar had “*eertijds*” (‘erewhile’) ordered the publication of this emblem book leads us to another publication: *Symbola et emblemata* (‘Symbols and emblems’), originally published in Amsterdam in 1705, with captions in Russian, Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, English and German.⁷ The headings are in Dutch. On the righthand page there are six numbered medallions with simple pictures (Sashalmi 2013, 459-472).

This publication has a very interesting history, going back to the residency of Czar Peter the Great in Amsterdam and Zaandam from August 1697 until January 1698. Part of this “Great Embassy to the West” was an incognito stay at the shipyard in Zaandam for about a week, and mostly in Amsterdam on the wharves of the *VOC* (*Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie*, or ‘Dutch East Indies Company’). Emblems and pictures had attracted his interest, but his real passion was, as he told the Electress of Hanover: “navigation and fireworks” (Hippisley 1989, xxiii; Massie 1980, chapter 14). Van den Burg writes in his magazine *Amsterdamsche Argus*:

⁵ This is the image of the greatest man that Moscow ever saw, who in his country recreated the night of the brain into day; who exorcised the foolhardy ignorance from the realm, who made the greatest heroes of his age tremble, And if you want to know what miracles he performed? One should ask, what I cannot express, the Turk and the Swede. It is Emperor Peter, who is called the Great one, and whose merits Europe can never forget. His miraculous glory overlaps Greek and Roman; And powerful Russia must attribute her grandeur to him.

⁶ De Vet (2014) writes that the Dutchman served Czar Peter the Great as informant and wonders whether the monarch was his patron.

⁷ Full text available at the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/57050625/>.

[...] de meeste van de Russen, ja van die, die onder hen de menslykste zyn, konnen niet begrypen, wat de Czaar altijd met dat afsteken van Vuurwerken wil beteekenen. (Van den Burg 1719, 355)⁸

To enhance his glory and not suffering from false modesty, the czar decorated his ships with emblems and symbols. Back in Russia, he wanted to express even more splendor by adorning triumphal arches and royal entries, fireworks, and the like, with illuminating emblems and devices. He also designed banners for his regiments, and coats of arms for many cities.

The czar could not have used *Symbola et emblemata* ('Symbols and emblems') for this purpose because it was not published until several years after his visit. Therefore, it is very likely that he came across an emblem book entitled *Devises et emblèmes anciennes et modernes* ('Old and modern mottos and emblems'), which had been assembled by the engraver Daniel de La Feuille and published in 1691 in Amsterdam. He must have enjoyed this and decided that there should be a Russian edition. According to a royal warrant of February 10, 1700, Peter arranged with merchant Jan Tesing to print books in Holland for sale in Russia. This turned out moderately successful, as some twenty titles, dictionaries, and De La Fontaine's *Fables* among them, were published and shipped. Unfortunately, Tesing could not enjoy much of the fruits of this enterprise, because he died a year later. More important was his helper Il'ja Kopievskij, a Pole living in Amsterdam, who was an able translator into Russian. However, his working days there were not long lasting either, because he moved out of the city in 1702. It is presumed that he most likely left his emblem-translations behind (Okenfuss 1998, 15-24; Rapschinsky 1935, 15-16 and 25-27). The result was the publication *Symbola et emblemata* ('Symbols and emblems') in 1705 by Hendrik Wetstein, a nowadays much sought-after work that even fetched \$ 72,000 at auction at Christie's in 2012. The pictures were engraved anew: the three rows of five medallions in De La Feuille's publication were changed into two rows of three medallions.

Two entrepreneuring publishers, Arend van Huissteen and Steven van Esveldt, issued this work again in Amsterdam in 1741, perhaps even using remainders from Wetstein, only changing the Latin title page into Dutch. The page now reads: "*Verzameling van zinspreuken, zinnebeelden, en zinnebeeldige vercieringen [...] door order van zyn czaarische majesteit Peter Alexis, bygenaamd de Grote [...] getekend en gesneden*" (Landwehr 1962, 78).⁹

⁸ [...] most of the Russians, I mean the ones among them that are the most human-like, cannot understand what the czar has in mind with all that lighting of fireworks.

⁹ A collection of mottos, emblems, and emblematic decorations [...] drawn and engraved by order of his majesty Czar Peter Alexis, known as the Great [...].

Many years later, in 1788, Nestor Ambodik would publish a new edition of *Symbola et emblemata* ('Symbols and emblems') in Saint Petersburg entitled *Emvlemy I symvoly* ('Symbols and emblems'). We will see that Van den Burg used other examples besides the *Symbola et emblemata* ('Symbols and emblems').

4. Devises et emblèmes anciennes et modernes (1691)

In 1743, two years after Van Huissteen and Van Esveldt's *Verzameling van zinspreuken* ('Collection of mottos'), Van den Burg and his publisher Marshoorn came out with their edition *Verzameling van uitgekorene zin-spreuken* ('Collection of selected mottos'). The texts were changed, but the pictures remained the same. In fact, it is almost certain that the exact same plates were used in both the 1741 and the 1705 editions. A quick comparison will show that in both editions numbers 625-628 have been misplaced and that from number 817 onward the numbers are reversed: 818-817 instead of 817-818; 820-819 instead of 819-820, etc. (Landwehr 1962, 78).

On further inspection, it is obvious that the emblems were nevertheless mostly copied from Daniel de La Feuille's *Devises et emblèmes anciennes et modernes* ('Old and modern mottos and emblems') and a subsequent work called *Devises et emblèmes d'amour* ('Mottos and emblems about love'), published in several editions in the last decade of the 17th century. They were for their part not entirely original either. It will take some time to list all the sources that he used, starting with Andrea Alciato's *Emblemata* ('Book of emblems') (1531), usually regarded as the first of the genre, and following other classics like Camerarius, Heinsius, Saavedra, Cats, Vaenius, and his contemporary Nicolas Verrien. They represent all the famous names in the popular field of emblemata, which prior to the 18th century had over 3000 separate editions by more than 700 authors. The *Utrecht emblem project*, a wonderful online resource, states unequivocally:

Clearly, the *Devises et Emblèmes* was presented as the ultimate collection of the most well-known examples of the European emblem books. This book can therefore be seen and used as a touchstone of the sixteenth and seventeenth century emblematic tradition. (<https://emblems.hum.uu.nl/>)

It is perhaps no coincidence that the pictures in this publication are shaped like a medallion and have the size of a pocket watch. Daniel de La Feuille was born around 1640 in Sedan (the French Ardennes), where he was trained to be a watchmaker. In 1683, Huguenot De La Feuille and his family fled to Amsterdam where he worked as an etcher and art dealer. In some of the pictures the decorative cartouches are even more interesting than the misshapen cupids or

animals. De La Feuille, who was also famous as a cartographer, died in 1709.¹⁰ In the “*Avertissement*” (‘Notice’) at the end of the work, Henri Offelen, “*Professeur en toutes ces Langues à Amsterdam*” (‘Professor of all these languages in Amsterdam’), is identified as the author of the multilingual mottos. He remains a footnote in this history of emblematic publications, confirming that in this case the picture was more important than the text. The *Utrecht emblem project* shows a facsimile edition.

5. Verzameling van uitgekorene zin-spreuken (1743)

A random example will show how Van den Burg put his edition together. In *Symbola et emblemata* (‘Symbols and emblems’), number 546, on pages 182 and 183, we read and see: “*Een Goude Pot, met bloemen*” (‘A golden pot with flowers’), which is subtitled “*Utrumque, richesse et abundance. Diviriae & abundanza. Riqueza y abundancia. rijkdommen en overvloed, richesses [sic] and abundances. Reichtum und Uberflusz*” (‘wealth and abundance’). On the opposite page one finds six medallions in two’s, one of which is a pot or vase with a large bouquet of flowers. The *Verzameling van uitgekorene zin-spreuken* (‘Collection of selected mottos’) has the same six pictures and Dutch title, but only Latin, French, and German, followed by Van den Burg’s distich:

*De Rykdom en de vrugt van vollen Overvloedt,
Zyn nog niet half zó veel, dan een gerust gemoedt.*

(Van den Burg 1743, 182)¹¹

The other illustrations on the page are Cupid and Venus, a weasel, a pillar with key and dagger, a swarm of bees and a crowned shield. As in the original, *Verzameling* (‘Collection’) has all in all some 840 emblems, with an enormous variety of subjects: 312 cupids represent love emblems, there are 27 trees, 25 lions, 24 suns, 21 hands, 19 eagles and laurels, 18 birds, 15 crowns, 14 stars and hearts, a few bombs, but also a walrus, a trumpet, a melon, a goat suckling a wolf, a dog-collar with spikes, a hand holding a book, a hand holding a flea, and other subjects. These sometimes-curious objects are enhanced with appropriate advising mottos or moral maxims, to make sure the reader will get the intended message.

Van den Burg (and perhaps his publisher also) must have thought that those extensive multilingual captions were too much of a good thing. He uses the original plates and replaces 5 of the 8, especially the Russian, which he admits he

¹⁰ Interested readers are referred to the website www.geographicus.com for many maps and biographical information.

¹¹ The richness and fruit of full abundance, are not half as much, as a quiet mind.

does not understand: “om dat wy de Boekstaven der Russische Tale niet magtig waren” (Van den Burg 1743, sp).¹² His main contribution is the new two-line verses in Dutch. He uses *zinnebeeldige leerstukken* (‘emblematic guidelines’) and enriches each with a meaningful saying.

Ik beken, dat ‘er onder zyn, die ik niet al te wel heb kunnen verstaan; ‘t welk my egter niet heeft afgeschrikt, om den my klaarst toegeschenen zin van elk EMBLEMA, in twee versen te berymen. (Van den Burg 1743, sp)¹³

In many cases he chooses the easy way out, by leaning on the Dutch in the original, and often using the adjective and noun as the base for his distichs.

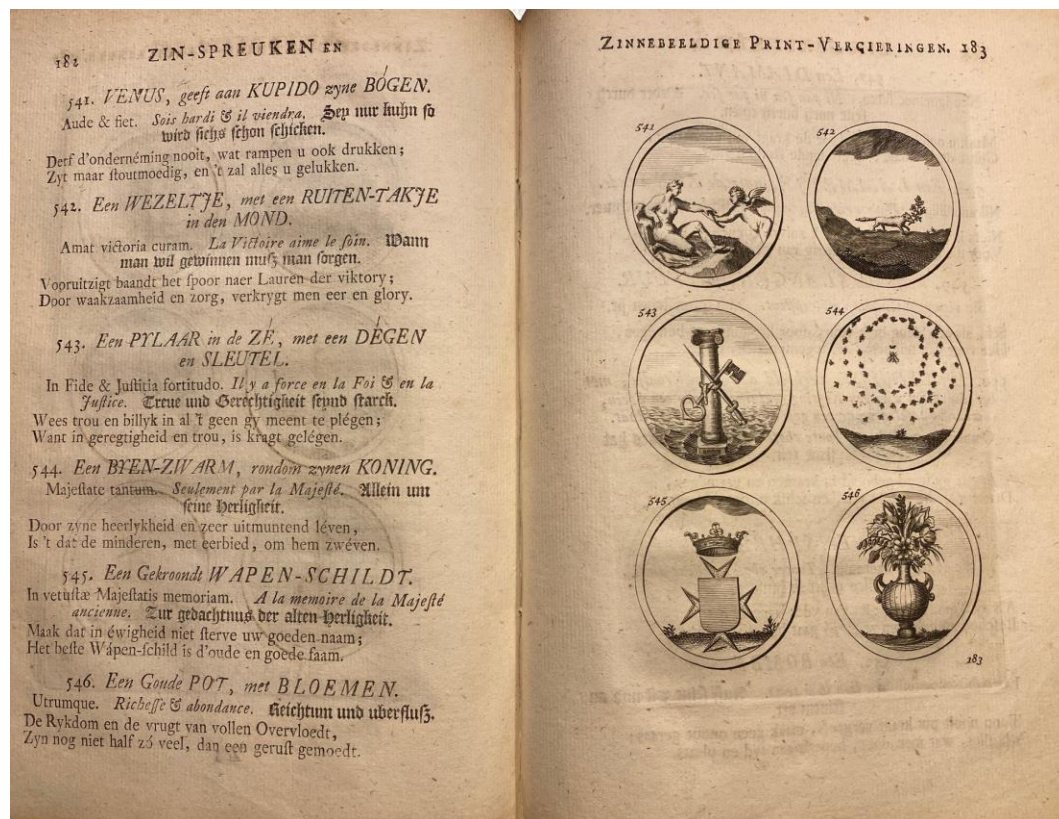


Figure 3. “Een Goude POT, met BLOEMEN” (‘A golden pot with flowers’) in Verzameling van uitgekorene zin-spreuken en zinnebeeldige print-vercieringen, Hermanus van den Burg, 1743. This work is in the public domain.

¹² [...] because we are not proficient in what is required by the Russian language.

¹³ I admit that there are among them some that I have not been able to comprehend very well, which did not prevent me from rhyming in two lines the clearest meaning of each EMBLEM.

It is somewhat of a surprise to recognize a few images from a very popular earlier Dutch literary example: *Sinne- en minnebeelden* ('Portraits of morality and love') (1665/1977)¹⁴ by Jacob Cats (1577-1660). It would be a stretch to presume that Van den Burg had simply copied from his illustrious forefather, but there are connecting images. Cats was always very expansive in his subscripts, and he enriched his emblems with copious quotes, often in Latin and French. The illustrations, usually made by Adriaen van de Venne, were always very detailed. Van den Burg did not have space, nor probably the inclination for all of that, and we must use our art historical eyes to look for similarities.

The caption under Van den Burg's *Bedrogen jager* ('deceived hunter') (number 810) reads:

*Waag u aan alles niet waar naer strekt uw verlangen;
Een driftig jager werd bedrogen en gevangen.*

(Van den Burg 1743, 270)¹⁵

We see a seagull caught by an oyster. This resembles the image in *Sinne- en minnebeelden* ('Portraits of morality and love') (number 25) by Jacob Cats (1665/1977, 45), who adds an extra admonition. After the oyster catches the seagull, he asks: "What is the oyster going to do now?" Both creatures are in a bind. In other words: think and plan ahead before you act, is the advice for both of them.

In another example, both Cats and Van den Burg use the caption *Het is schande met dooden te vechten* ('It is a disgrace to fight with the dead') and we read under number 497:

*Wil by 's mans leven uw geschil met hem beslegten:
Het is een dood-schand de versturvne te bevegten.*

(Van den Burg 1743, 166)¹⁶

We see a few hares jumping on a dead lion. Here again we have a Jacob Cats' predecessor:

*Een haes bespringt ook wel een leeuw,
wanneer hij geeft zijn lesten geeuw.*

(Cats 1665/1977, 152)¹⁷

¹⁴ Facsimile reprint of 1665 edition.

¹⁵ Don't risk everything to get what you desire; a hasty hunter was deceived and captured.

¹⁶ Do resolve your quarrel during a man's life: it is a deadly disgrace to fight with the dead.

¹⁷ A hare jumps even on a lion, when he gives his last yawn.

Cats (1665/1977, 153) admonishes this time in English: “The glory of the kings is like the snuff of a candle.” The difference in quality of the picture, an obvious De La Feuille copy, is evident.

The third example of a Cats/Van den Burg linkage has the caption *Vertrouwt, en mistrouwt* (‘trust and distrust’), (number 588), which reads as follows:

*Al schynt u alles schoon, poog u steeds te berouen;
Vertrou niet al te ligt, nog wil te zeer mistrouen.*

(Van den Burg 1743, 196)¹⁸

The image is entitled “*Een VOS, luisterende op het YS*” (‘A fox listening on the ice’) and can also be found in Jacob Cats’ (1665/1977) *Emblemata moralia et oeconomica* (‘Moral and business emblems’), part of the *Sinne- en minnebeelden* (‘Portraits of morality and love’). “*Wickt eer je waagt*” (‘think before you act’), says Cats (1665/1977, 105), and describes how the fox listens to the current of the water to know how thick the ice is. In the background we see a man trying to rescue a fellow, who has fallen through the ice. This typical Dutch rescue scene in the back is missing in the original Alciato (1531) as well as from Camerarius’ (1587) emblems. As in the previous Cats-examples, the illustrations are by Adriaen van de Venne and, according to Porteman (1977, 130), were done after the text. Van den Burg’s *Vertrouwt, en mistrouwt* (‘trust and distrust’) is much vaguer than Cats’ (1665/1977) fatherly warning to think it over before you give it a try. He used De La Feuille’s poor and un-Dutch model, which does not show a Dutch landscape with a skater, images sometimes referred to as “*realistisch*” (‘realistic’) or “*echte Nederlandse emblemata*” (‘real Dutch emblemata’) (Porteman 1977, 117-118).

6. Emblem books in the 18th century

The number of writers and journalists in the 18th century was increasing, and so was the demand for illustrations for artisans and craftsmen. In many Russian palaces one will find examples from the *Symbola et emblemata* (‘Symbols and emblems’) on tiles and porcelain; symbols selected from the book can be found on silverware and utensils. Although the one Russian edition was not reprinted until 1788, there were many emblem books on the Western market (Hippisley 1989, 5). As Daly (1979, 23) writes about the 16th and 17th centuries: “The emblem (...) is addressed to a larger audience, its message is general, and it fulfils a didactic, decorative or entertaining function, or any combination of these.”

¹⁸ Even if everything seems fine to you, always try to be cautious; do not trust too easily, nor distrust too much.

However, the popularity of emblem books was dwindling, as researcher Mario Praz (cited in Landwehr 1962, VIII) lists 168 examples in the Low Countries in the 17th century, and 65 in the 18th century. These numbers are imprecise as John Landwehr in his 1988 bibliography's preface admits: "Every writer on emblematics must face the fact that the field is not – and cannot be – strictly and exactly delimited" (Landwehr 1988, 7). The *Utrecht emblem project* does not cover the 18th century, but Landwehr's (1988) inaccurate bibliography gives us plenty of Dutch names like Frederik Berkenkamp, Matthaeus Brouerius van Nidek, Willem den Elger, Hendrik Graauwhart, Jan van der Veen, Govert Klinkhamer, Adriaan Spinniker, Arnold Houbraken, Jan Luyken, Claas Bruin, Jan Huygen, and E. Verryke. Arnold Houbraken is best known among art historians for his biographies of painters; Jan Luyken is famous for his *Duytsche lier* ('Dutch lyre') and his *100 Verbeeldingen van ambachten* ('100 Representations of trades').

For many years the *bibliografie* ('bibliography'), a part of De Vries' (1899, reprint 1976) dissertation entitled *De Nederlandsche emblemata. Geschiedenis en bibliografie tot de 18^e eeuw* ('Dutch Emblems. History and bibliography until the 18th century'), was a useful but dated source for researchers of Dutch emblems. Of additional information are his remarks about the 'borrowing' of pictures, which he illustrates in 8 examples in his bibliography. He quotes "*prulpoët*" ('trashy poet') Claas Bruin who in 1722 mentions that he has made rhymed thoughts on the emblems taken from others, at the request of his friend Schijnvoet for the bookseller Hendrik Bosch. He even does the same four years later with Otto van Veen's *Emblems of divine love* at the request of bookseller Danckertsz. De Vries (1899/1976, 42-43) writes:

In de meeste gevallen echter nam men maar brutaalweg de prentjes over, zonder vermelding van herkomst, drukte soms een stuk van den tekst erbij af en gaf het boek een andere titel.¹⁹

It has been pointed out that Dutch emblematical works from this later period show an encyclopedic preference for large iconological collections for artists and poets, and that book decoration became more general and French inspired. A tendency to more pious reflections is also noticeable by merely looking at the many titles that include "virtue", "bible" or "edifying" (De La Fontaine Verwey 1934, 34). Anton Korteweg (2017) points in his poetry anthology *Het oog van de dichter* ('The eye of the poet') at the homely, sober moralism of Jacob Cats' *Sinne en minnebeelden* ('Portraits of morality and love'), appealing to the Dutch protestants, but which brought the scorn of Conrad Busken Huet in the 19th

¹⁹ In most cases one just brazenly took over the emblems, without mentioning sources, printed sometimes a small piece of the original text and gave the book a different title.

century, for who “*deze godvrezende moneymaker is de incarnatie geweest van de Nederlandse demon*” (‘this godfearing moneymaker was the incarnation of the Dutch demon’) (Korteweg 2017, 234).

The quality of the emblem books differed substantially, and many pirated editions and copied emblems suffered from poor quality. Many lions look like the Cheshire cat, trees have different names but look alike, and quite a few cupids suffer from obesity. These cupids come in different forms and actions, like skating, peeing, lion taming, a black cupid shooting a white cupid, cupid on crutches, cupid assisting the handicapped and several others.

From this abundance, I have been able to point out a few examples and have made only some observations. It seems obvious that if you try to define the reading public, one must include people with a certain education, a knowledge of classical mythology and familiarity with more than one language. There are many projects waiting for further research, where literary and art historians can work hand in hand. It brings to mind Henry Fielding, who wrote around the same time in his preface to *Joseph Andrews* (1742) about the sister arts: “What Caricatura is in painting, Burlesque is in writing (...) the Monstrous is much easier to paint than describe, and the Ridiculous to describe than paint.”

7. Van den Burg’s emblematics

When Nestor Ambodik (Hippisley 1989) was preparing his Russian edition in 1788 of *Symbola et emblemata* (‘Symbols and emblems’) entitled *Emvlemy I symvoloy* (‘Symbols and emblems’), he had made a study of emblems and symbols. He tried to define his subject as follows:

An Emblem is a witty representation, or an enigmatic picture, that presents to the eye any natural being or particular story, with a purposeful inscription attaching to it that consists of a brief utterance of words. A Symbol is a brief inscription consisting of a witty utterance of few words that contain a complete meaning in themselves, which on being combined with an emblem, guide us to the knowledge of another thing or story that contains either an historical, political, moral, or religious meaning or some similar significance. There are various kinds of Emblems, namely: divine, spiritual, historical, political, heraldic, moral, mystical, etc. Symbols also may be inscriptions, signs, proverbs, sayings, riddles, devices, parables, fables, allegories, hieroglyphs, etc. (Hippisley 1989, 5)

This was a vast expansion of the early moralistic and didactic road, and by inclusion of so many subjects, does not define much. Perhaps we do not need a definition but only the wonder and enjoyment, as a young Ivan Turgenev felt as he described: “For a whole day I thumbed through my marvelous book and went

to sleep with my head full of a whole world of troubling shapes.” Eight-year-old Ivan had found the emblem book in the library, and he even used it in 1859 in his second novel *Home of the gentry* (Turgenev 1920, 57, 91 and 205).

Hippisley (1989) describes in the introduction of the 1989 reprint that the appropriations are still of a wide variety via De La Feuille. It is clear from all research that publication required some considerable expenditure, as it involved an investment in a poet, an artist, and an engraver. Our Dutch edition went for 5 guilders and 10 stivers, which is almost a weekly salary for a laborer at the time.

Van den Burg (1743, *sp*) states that his intention was “*tydverdryf en Vermaak*” (‘pastime and amusement’). He is moving away from the *utile-dulce*-cliché of useful and entertaining, although the many lessons, admonitions and advice from previous ages cannot be ignored. Funny or humorous are not the adjectives one thinks of as we read his interpretations, which remind one of a finger-raising ‘Dutch uncle’. Therefore, it is no wonder that we find recurring ideas in words like “virtue, jealousy, nature, God, sun, honour, life, death, time and love.” He did not invent new emblems, only new poetic lines, and in general succeeded in rhythm, meter, and rhyming words. Of course, one does not read this book in one session, as the many cupids and their descriptions become tiresome. There are lighter moments, for instance when he comes up with new words like “*egtzoet*” for ‘marital sweetness’, or “*lyfberging*” for ‘hiding place’ here used for a rabbit hole, “*aardies*” for ‘earthly’, “*uurwysplank*” for a ‘sundial’, and a tongue twister like “*schynschoons grimlach*” an ‘illusionary semblance of a grimace’. Sometimes he had an off-day, for instance in these lines: “*Zy werken, maar elk werkt, ten dienst van ‘t zelvde werk*” (Van den Burg 1743, 104). No translation needed for this lame description of ‘bees around a beehive’.

Van den Burg was not a profound or deep thinker as a *broodschrijver* or *broodpoeet* (‘author or poet who writes for a living, for food, literally bread’), and the Dutch sounds more positive than the English ‘hack’, which does not indicate that daily bread might be involved. In his age, *negotium* (‘occupation’) had for many scribblers replaced the *otium* (‘leisure’). A poetry anthology in the early 19th century quotes a Van den Burg rhyme: *Noodzaakelyk gereedschap voor eenen Dichter* (‘necessary tool for a poet’):

*Zo noodig als het zwaard is in een Krygsmans hand, Zo noodig is het geld
een Dichter in dit land.* (Van den Burg 1718, 40)²⁰

The compiler of the anthology, Marten Westerman (n.d.), regards him as a typical 18th century poet:

²⁰ As necessary as the sword is in a warrior’s hand, so is money necessary for a poet in this land.

Onder dezen is vooral Hermanus van den Burg te tellen, wiens gedichten wel een weelderig vernuft kenmerken, doch tevens de bewijzen opleveren, dat zoodanig een vernuft zich niet zonder een geleide volkomen ontwikkelt: en dikwijls bejammeren wij bij hem eene onkiesche ruwheid, welke vordert, menig stuk der vergetelheid over te laten, hetwelk, om deszelfs geestigheid, anderzints verdienen zou algemeener bekend te worden.

(Westerman n.d., 35e stukje, 4-5; Broos 2011, 85-93)²¹

He is indeed not generally known, even if a bibliography of his works counts about a hundred numbers. They show a perfect example of the trials and tribulations of a Dutch inhabitant of Grub Street, the legendary writers' alleyway. An early work is entitled *De gehoornde schout* ('The cuckolded sheriff') and many other examples point to a farcical style of writing, especially in his pamphlets. His *Mengelpoëzie* ('mixed poetry'), in several volumes, confirms the infrequent sampling of his poetry and occasional poetical assignments. *Mengelzangen* ('mixed songs') includes music notations from several composers.²² The impression that his style is more inspired by pecuniary than literary concerns is often justified, as a pamphlet on tax increases confirms. A large translation project – 44 historical books of Justinus – appeared posthumously and was characterized by himself as "*moeilijk en gedwongen*" ('difficult and forced'), because of "*zo vele tusschenvoegingen en instoppingen, om aan de rijmklanken te voldoen*" ('so many interjections and stopgaps, to satisfy the rhyming sounds') (De Vries 1810, 80). Komrij (2002, 14-24) included him in his selection of poetry called *De drekpoeten* ('the excrement poets') with some smelly examples. There are two laudatory poems remembering and honoring Lukas Rotgans, as proof that he belonged to the well-known literary scene (Rotgans 1735, 2-3).

In 1719, he started a weekly journal called *Amsterdamsche Argus*, intended to satirize serious news on political and economic subjects. It provoked Jacob Campo Weyerman, fellow journalist, and biographer of Dutch painters, to start his weekly *Rotterdamsche Hermes*, in which Van den Burg is roasted mercilessly. He accuses his opponent of an awful style of writing, a soporific content and pours a plethora of negative characteristics in several installments of his journal. Van den Burg avoids confrontation for months, but finally answers:

²¹ Among these, one should count especially Hermanus van den Burg, whose poems do characterize a wide-ranging intellect, but do also give proof that such an intellect without a good guide does not develop completely, and often we lament in him a crude roughness, which forces many pieces to live in oblivion, which because of their cheerfulness otherwise deserve to be more generally known.

²² Van den Burg's mixed songs or *mengelzangen* can be accessed here: https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/burg005meng02_01/burg005meng01_01_0003.php.

*'k Twist met geen Adder, dik van zwarte en groene gal, Een Pest, die Laster
braekt met ongehoord geschal; Een Hydra, die al waer zy kruipt besmet den
grond, Wie trad in 't vechtperk ooit met eenen dollen Hond?*

(Groenenboom-Draai 1994, 89-99)²³

It shows the level of debate, although Van den Burg mostly fought back anonymously in pamphlets. A less than flattering poetic obituary by Pieter Langendijk²⁴ shows also how nasty writers' quarrels could be (Smit 2000, 245).

On another occasion, involving a much more powerful person, Van den Burg had to pay a hefty price for his pen. It leads us all the way back full circle to the Russian court, where Dutch was made the official language, because "*Peter de Grote sprak en schreef vrij goed Nederlands (...) Zijn bewondering voor de Republiek ging zo ver dat hij in 1710 het Nederlands zelfs tot hoftaal maakte*"²⁵ (Frehse-de Jonge 2013, 245). Van den Burg's weekly magazine was read there, apparently. As a former Dutch language instructor, I have my reservations about the level of Dutch competence at the imperial court. Nevertheless, we saw the exaggerated praise that Van den Burg had for the Russian czar on the title page of his 1743 emblem book, which probably had its origin in an incident that triggered this attitude. In his *Amsterdamsche Argus* he had been making fun of the czar, and on May 20, 1722, the Russian ambassador in Holland, Boris Ivanovitsj Kurakin, was asked by the czarina to investigate the magazine. Van den Burg thanks the czarina openly for her interest and promises not to do anything inappropriate. However, he overplays his hand on June 10, when he publishes a sonnet in which the court jester tells him in a dream that the czar is suffering from flatulence, following a news flash that Peter the Great had to postpone his trip to Astrakhan because of constipation. Van den Burg urges the doctors to apply an enema to purge *Eolus*, the god of winds. In his weekly of July 8, he backtracks somewhat and suggests that the reason might have been that some horses just happen to have wide hips. This was followed on July 20, when he goes all out in praising the czar. Unfortunately for him, this was too late. On August 22, 1722, Czar Peter the Great officially asks the states of Holland and West Friesland to take correctional measures. They indeed find writer and publisher guilty, and the verdict is an official ban of publishing for six weeks and the magazine to be publicly burned

²³ I do not quarrel with a viper thick with black and green bile, a pest who barfs with unheard-of ringing sounds; a Hydra, who infects the ground where she slithers; who would ever enter the fighting ring with a mad dog?

²⁴ Dutch dramatist and poet of the 18th century.

²⁵ Peter the Great spoke and wrote Dutch fairly well (...) His admiration for the Republic went so far that he even made Dutch the official language at his court.

(Bostoën & Hanou 1997, 151; Van Vliet 1996, 344-349). Jacob Campo Weyerman writes about this from prison on July 10, 1739:

Nooit heb ik eenige moogendheden aangeraakt in mijne schriften; geheel anders als den schrijver van het wekelijks papier getytelt den Argus, wiens schimpschrift tegens den Keyzer van Groot-Rusland in het openbaar is verbrant geworden tot Muyden ten verzoeke van den heere Brants, resident van die majesteit. (Bostoën & Hanou 1997, 171)²⁶

Van den Burg lived just outside Holland's provincial jurisdiction of Muyden and was not indicted, but his journal never reappeared. I will leave it up to the reader's imagination to make all kinds of parallels with the modern-day relations between Russia and the West. I am sure we can find a fitting emblem for that: two hands trying to reach each other, with the motto *Fide et diffide*: trust and distrust.

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²⁶ I have never touched upon any high and mighty persons in my writings; different from the author of the weekly magazine called *Argus*, whose libelous writing against the czar of Great-Russia was burned in public in Muyden at the request of Mr. Brants, resident of that majesty.

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About the author

Ton Broos studied Dutch in Amsterdam and got his PhD in Nijmegen on a dissertation about Jacob Campo Weyerman and his biographies of painters. He taught Dutch in Sheffield, UK, and did the same for thirty years at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, MI, USA. Before and after his retirement in 2012, he published translations of Mariken van Nimwegen, Elckerlyc and recently Anthony Winkler Prins. In many articles he wrote about 18th century imaginary voyages, works by Bert Schierbeek, E. M. Beekman, and Anne Frank's literary interests. His latest enterprise is the promoting of the preservation and digitization of the spectacular collection of pamphlets and tracts at the University of Michigan Library.

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Les connexions russes du livre d'emblèmes de Hermanus van den Burg (1682-1752)

Hermanus van den Burg (1682-1752) est connu dans la littérature néerlandaise pour sa rivalité avec son collègue journaliste Jacob Campo Weyerman (1677-1747). En 1743, cependant, il publia un recueil de 840 emblèmes, ou devises illustrées, qui étaient dédiés au tsar Pierre le Grand. Le séjour de ce dernier en Hollande avait stimulé la littérature emblématique, comme en témoigne l'édition russe *Symbola et emblemata* parue en 1705. Van den Burg s'en est inspiré, ainsi que de livres d'emblèmes français. Ce genre littéraire populaire a attiré maints artistes et poètes internationaux, et les éditions néerlandaises en particulier ont été nombreuses aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles. Quelques exemples montrent les similitudes avec l'œuvre de Van den Burg ainsi que l'intention de cet auteur, qui voulait joindre l'utile à l'agréable et divertir ses lecteurs. L'article se termine par un incident dans lequel les connexions russes se démarquent.

De Russische connecties van het embleemboek van Hermanus van den Burg (1682-1752)

Hermanus van den Burg (1682-1752) is in de Nederlandse literatuur bekend om zijn rivaliteit met zijn collega-journalist Jacob Campo Weyerman (1677-1747). In 1743 publiceerde hij echter een verzameling van 840 emblemata, een plaatje met een praatje, die waren opgedragen aan Tsaar Peter de Grote. Diens verblijf in Holland had de emblemata-literatuur gestimuleerd hetgeen blijkt uit de Russische uitgave *Symbola et emblemata* in 1705. Van den Burg copieerde hieruit, maar ook uit Franse voorbeelden. Dit populaire genre inspireerde internationale kunstenaars en dichters en vooral Nederlandse uitgaven bloeiden in de 17^e en 18^e eeuw. Enkele voorbeelden laten de overeenkomsten zien en de intentie van Van den Burg die het nuttige met het aangename wilde laten en zijn lezers vermaken. Het artikel besluit met een incident waarbij Russische connecties opvallen.