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Triangular Numbers in Henry Peacham's *Minerva Britanna*: A Study in Jacobean Literary Form

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his article investigates the presence of a concealed and previously undetected numerical symbolism in a Stuart-era emblem book, Henry Peacham's *Minerva Britanna* (1611). Although alien to modern conceptions of art, emblem books constitute one of the most widely published and popular genres in early modern book production. Drawing from an eclectic tradition of literary, religious, and iconological traditions, the emblem book combined words and images into complex patterns of signification, often of a markedly didactic character. Popular in all the European vernaculars, it appealed to a wide range of Renaissance readers, from the nearly illiterate (by virtue of its illustrated nature) to the most erudite (by virtue of its reputation for dazzling displays of intellectual and aesthetic virtuosity).

By convention the emblem was divided into three parts: *superscriptio*, *pictura*, and *subscriptio*: the *superscriptio* was the short legend or motto that typically appeared at the top of the page; below it appeared the *pictura* – the emblem *per se* – followed by the *subscriptio*, a longer responsive analysis, usually written in verse, which completed the design. While emblem book scholars still debate the exact relationship between the three parts – and no doubt individual emblem writers themselves sometimes conceived of it in different ways, Deitrich Walter Jöns' definition constitutes a useful and standard point of departure: "Between the motto and the picture there existed a more or less hidden relationship in meaning which the epigram illuminated."² This definition may readily be illustrated by Figure One, where the subscript of Peacham's emblem #24 (E4r) explains the connection between the superscript, *Merenti* – "to the one meriting" – and the *pictura*, remarking that in Peacham's day, unlike the romanticized past "Age of Justice," "Mome and Midas

share/In vertues merit, and th' inglorious is/allowed sometimes a place in Honours chair." This explains why the accompanying emblem shows a coat of arms that is incomplete and of undesigned reference. Honor's chair, Peacham implies, has been usurped by the pretender and true merit goes unrecognized and unrewarded.

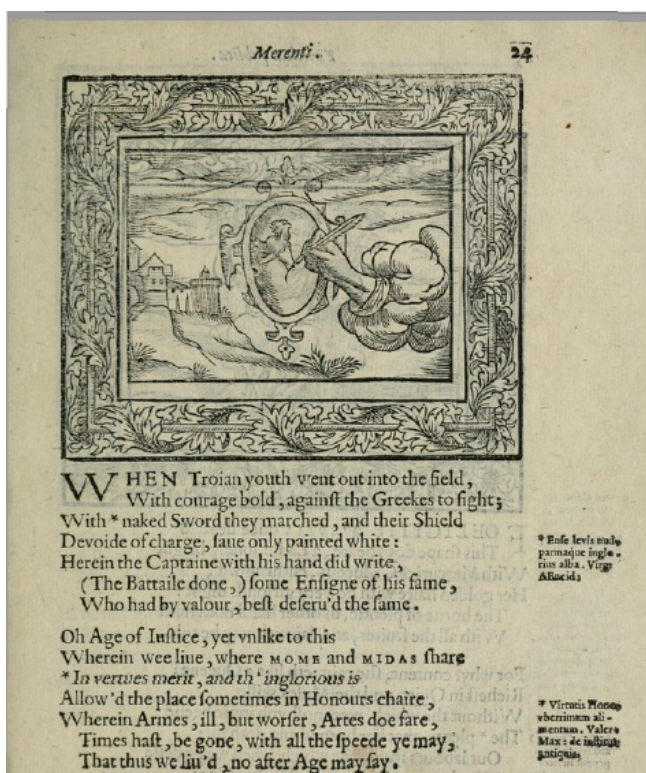


Figure One: Emblem 24, Merenti (“To the one meriting”).

Although many of Peacham's emblems are derived from the author's own *Basilikon Doron* manuscripts (see Young 1998) or one of several continental sources detailed in a series of articles by Mason Tung, the arrangement and many details of the emblems, as well as most of the verses and the work's elaborate critical apparatus, are unique to *Minerva Britannia*.³ Peacham's book contains 206 emblems (including the well known title page),⁴ comprised of the usual tripartite structure consisting of emblem, epigrammatic superscript, and lyrical exposition (subscript) – the latter typically composed of two six-line stanzas of iambic pentameter, rhyming *ababccdedeff*.

Although long regarded as the most sophisticated exemplar of the emblem book genre produced in early modern England, analysis of the formal dimension of Peacham's work has proven controversial for several reasons. Beyond the generic skepticism faced by all studies of putative numerical structures in early modern

literary works there exists a prevailing emphasis in emblem book studies on analyzing individual emblems as isolated elements possessing little or no significant semiotic relationship to other emblems or to the entire work in which they appear. Mason Tung's studies of the sources of Peacham's emblems⁵ are typical of a discourse which has lavished attention, however productively, on the origins and interpretation of individual emblems while uncritically assuming that *Minerva Britannia* possesses "little intrinsic unity as an emblem collection apart from its generally sustained tone of moral didacticism."⁶ While this discourse has contributed much to a collective understanding of Peacham's influences, and to the rich semiotic and historical context of individual emblems, it has also tended to take for granted a critical assumption that instead deserves investigation – namely that Peacham's book is an uncoordinated assemblage of emblems (with corresponding verses) in which the whole is no more than the sum of its individual parts. There is little visible unity in Peacham's book, and on the surface his rhetoric can be taken to support what Peter M. Daley has called "a characteristically emblematic view of the universe, namely that whatever is presented to the eyesight carries significance to the beholder."⁷ But eyes can also deceive, as Garter Herald William Segar paradoxically insists in his dedicatory verses to Peacham's book:

Eies may deluded be by false illusions:
 Eies may be partiall, eyesight may decline
 By weakenes, age, or by abusions.
 Pride, envie, folly, may the sight pervert,
 And make the eie transgresse against the heart.
 With outward ei'ne first view, and marke this booke,
 Variety of obiects much will please;
 With inward ei'ne then on the matter looke....

(B3v)

With all due respect to the many fine scholars who have approached Peacham's emblems primarily as uncoordinated elements that do not belong to any larger semiotic pattern, I propose in this paper to follow Herald Segar's advice "with inward ei'ne" to "on the matter looke" — to see, in the words of Bushy in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, if something "eyed awry" may better "distinguish form" (2.2.19-20). In investigating the possibility that Peacham might have employed a sophisticated numerical symbolism to impart some unity to his book it will be important to understand the central role that number theory played in Medieval and early modern aesthetics. Although mathematics was an arcane and taboo subject, number theory had long remained a prominent topic of *sub rosa* speculation and inquiry. According to Paulinus of Nola (c. 354-431), articulating a widely-shared metaphysics, all things in creation had been disposed "ut numerus cum re conveniret/so that number should agree with matter." This theory of the commensurability of numerical form with substance is a specific application of a more generic Medieval mentalité, one that survived well into the Renaissance (and

beyond), in which the boundaries between things and symbols were permeable, and the act of representation was inseparable from the exercise of *influence*. Doctrines incorporating the belief that representation was a species of influence were especially prominent in the visual arts. According to E.H. Gombrich, “claims for the special [esoteric] position of the visual tradition were rooted in a philosophical tradition of long standing”⁸ in which “no clear gulf separate[ed] the material, visible world from the sphere of the spirit,”⁹ and consequently the modern distinction between what an image represents and what it symbolizes was unknown.

Milton Klonsky records the belief “that in some lost Arcadian foretime mankind had actually possessed a single sacred language in which idea and image were one.”¹⁰ The advent of printing paradoxically facilitated the dissemination of this idealized tradition of a sacred language, tracing a genesis back through the Greek Pythagoras to Egyptian hieroglyphics. The 1505 publication in Venice of the *Hieroglyphika* of Horapollo, a fifth-century scribe, popularized the association between the emblem book and ancient forms of hieratic consciousness. By the time of Achilles Bocchi’s 1574 *Symbolicarum Questionum*, the emblem book genre was inseparable from these hermetic doctrines, and more generally with traditions about number popularly derived from Pythagoras:

Quam originationem ait
Fabius. fuere symbola
Priscorum in arcanis diu
Mysterijs, ut gratia
Verbim papaver fertilem
Signabat annum. Huiusmodi
Sunt Pythagorica Symbola

Ut Alciati Emblemata
Dicuntur &
Mysteriorum plena

Fabius says that symbols originated in the secret mysteries of the ancients. The poppy, for example, signified a fertile harvest. Of these same sorts are the Pythagorean symbols; as Alciat¹¹ has said they are “full of secrets.”¹²

It was even widely believed that Pythagoras, who adopted the practice of Egyptian priests by delivering his precepts in the form of recondite *dicta*, first infused into the Western tradition the doctrines of pictorial mystery eventually embodied in the Renaissance emblem book. As S.K. Heninger recounts the tradition, “[Pythagoras’] *Symbola*, reinforced with literary esoterica such as the *Hieroglyphica* of Horapollo and the mystic symbols of the Kabalists, were assimilated by neo-Platonists of the Florentine academy and eventually gave rise to the prolific emblem literature of the sixteenth century.”¹³

A frequent objection to numerical analysis of Renaissance literary works is the absence of any explicit discussion, either in ancient or Renaissance arts theory, of the application of number theory to literature.¹⁴ Despite impressive witness that “numbers, ratios, and geometric figures link the arts generally, by way of the microcosm, to the macrocosm,”¹⁵ numerical analysis of literary works has historically been inhibited by the fact that “the principles underlying the applications of numbers to composition tend to remain assumed rather than expressed.”¹⁶ In other words, evidence for numerical structure is largely implicit, concealed in the numeric and proportional aspects of the works themselves rather than articulated in an explicit doctrine.

That such a numerical scaffolding exists for many Medieval and early modern works is, however, generally accepted and in itself relatively uncontroversial. So sober an intellectual historian as Ernst Robert Curtius, who coined the term “numerical composition” (*zahlenkomposition*), proposes that in the Middle Ages the dominant principle of written composition, in part to compensate for the absence of more formal rhetorical rules of *dispositio*, was based on the principle of number. Such an organizational strategy, suggested Curtius, accomplished the twofold purpose of supplying “formal scaffolding” and endowing a work with “symbolic profundity,”¹⁷ by connecting formal design to explicit content. As Maren-Sofie Røstvig clarifies, numerical composition “can be defined as structural use of pre-selected numbers whose symbolism accords with the contents”¹⁸ of a work. Since the 1960s, a steady stream of books and articles — Hieatt (1960), Røstvig (1963), Fowler (1964, 1970) and MacQueen (1985), among others — have demonstrated the semiotic richness of numerical analysis of literary works and gone far to expose the “hidden sense” embodied in the numerical structures of early modern literature. Although doubters remain, by now the premise that arithmology is “one of the prime symbolic language systems of the Renaissance,”¹⁹ employed to embody metaphysical realities in a visible form, enjoys wide and growing currency.

From a synthetic view of intellectual history, it is unsurprising that number should play a significant role in literary art. The ideals of symmetry, proportion, and ratio are guiding principles of all other arts – architecture, music theory, and visual art – from their earliest developments. Renaissance ideals of beauty, as Leon Battista Alberti attests in a well known passage, were closely tied to the idea of proportion and number:

Beauty is a kind of harmony and concord of all the parts to form a whole which is constructed according to a fixed number, and a certain relation and order, as symmetry, the highest and most perfect law of nature, demands.²⁰

This Pythagorean belief that number was an intrinsic and universal property of the cosmos, underlying visible realities of every kind and requiring application in all the arts, was inherited from the ancient world, applied through the Middle Ages, enthusiastically embraced in the Renaissance, and eventually endorsed even by the founder of modern scientific practice, Rene Descartes. A formidable library

containing works of such eminent 15th and 16th century intellectuals as Marsilio Ficino, Joachim Camerarius, and Claude Mignault endorsed and systematized the Pythagorean principles.²¹ In Plutarch's synopsis, as translated by Philemon Holland, Pythagoras "held that the principle of all things were Numbers, and their symmetries, that is to say the proportions they have in their correspondency one unto "another...termed by him Geometrical." ²² Scriptural tradition reinforced a pagan conception of primordial number that increasingly was acknowledged to have immediate practical utility in architecture, war, and mechanics: "But thou hast arranged all things by measure and number and weight."²³

Beyond the prominent role of arithmology in early modern aesthetics, and especially the close affinity between number theory and symbolic emblems (reputedly going back as far as Pythagoras), there are several specific reasons to hypothesize that *Minerva Britannia* might be built on the scaffolding of an esoteric numerical structure. Although best known for his emblem books, epigrams, and instructional manuals on the art of drawing, Peacham was a Renaissance polymath, versatile in music, astronomy and mathematics as well as poetry and drawing. As an acolyte of the "Pythagorean poet" Spenser—who may well have composed the dedicatory verses prefixing *Minerva* signed "E.S." some twelve years or more before the book appeared in print²⁴—Peacham may well have been familiar with Renaissance numerological strategies. His experience as a painter, arts theorist, and emblem designer would have reinforced the omnipresent analogy between literature and painting that pervades both ancient and Renaissance arts criticism, and exposed him to the relevant doctrines of symmetry and numerical form. This affinity for Renaissance number theory would also have been confirmed through his study and practice of music, a discipline in which, as Alan R. Young (1979) has shown, Peacham was both theorist and practitioner. Most significantly, Peacham explicitly acknowledges his affinity for the occult science of mathematics, describing himself in *The Truth of Our Times* (1638) as one "ever naturally *addicted to those Arts and Sciences which consist of proportion and number*, as Painting, Musicke, and poetry, and the Mathematical Sciences."²⁵ This explicit confession of "addiction" to the principles of "number and proportion" assumes a larger significance when we recall the scarcity of explicit discussion, either in ancient or Renaissance arts theory, of the application of number theory to literature.²⁶ Paradoxically, such criticisms implicitly acknowledge that the presence of overt numerical language can be strong evidence for the existence of arithmetical structure in a particular work.

With this in mind we will be intrigued to notice how thoroughly the rhetorical posture of *Minerva's* elaborate introductory apparatus amplifies Peacham's own overt testimony in *Truth of Our Times*. Peacham's book is prefaced by an extensive dedicatory apparatus including Peacham's own prose and verse dedications to Prince Henry Stuart, as well as dedicatory verses, in English, Latin, French and Italian, by Thomas Harding, "Hannibal Ursinus Neapolitanus," Giovanni Batista Cassell, N.M. Fortunaius, Thomas Heywood, English Garter Herald at Arms William Segar, and "E. S." A peculiar "Author's Conclusion" of 180 iambic tetrameter lines of ekphrastic²⁷ verse, divided into 22 ½ eight-line stanzas, concludes the work.

Thomas Harding's Latin exordium (Appendix A)²⁸ seems particularly noteworthy from the perspective of a numerical semiotics. Composed in cryptic mathematical terminology, it praises the contributions of the other dedicatory poets as the "friendly testimony of the skilled ones," adding "I follow them and join (*iungo*) my own counter (*calculus*)."²⁹ *Calculus* is the proper technical term²⁹ for the pebble used by the ancients for counting purposes.³⁰ Both Harding's title, "ex puris iambis" ("from pure iambs"), and the structure of his lyric mirrors the numerical content by invoking arithmology in design: the poem consists of three eight-line stanzas of iambic hexameters, for a total of 144 feet, or twelve squared. The fraught mathematical terminology of Harding's exordium, embedded in the context of an explicitly mathematical structure, furnishes a rare yet striking example of relatively overt testimony to the numerical character of a Renaissance literary work. In fact, Harding's entire exordium, which begins by specifying a moral methodology for correct "measurement" of Peacham's work ("iniquuus aestimator ille ducitur/suo metitur omne qui modo ac pede/iniquitous is deemed that appraiser who measures [metitur] everything by his own method and foot"), is based upon a conceit of measurement.

While the precise implication of the invoked measurement – the "feet" and their relationship to the "calculi" – is far from clear, the most obvious place to begin investigation of a numerical structure would be with counting lines, treating each one as a "calculus." The results will encourage the hypothesis that Peacham's work is organized around well-understood but previously undetected abstract principles of Pythagorean number symbolism. Following this hypothesis, we soon discover confirmation in several features. First, there is the curious fact that Peacham's own introductory exordium to Prince Henry numbers exactly sixty-six lines of dactylic hexameters. Sixty-six is a peculiar and suggestive number: not only does it mirror the characteristic stanza structure of most of Peacham's emblems (two stanzas of six lines each), and replicate the dominant mode *six* in the hexameter lines of which it is composed, but most significantly belongs to the Pythagorean sequence of triangular numbers (appendix B).³¹

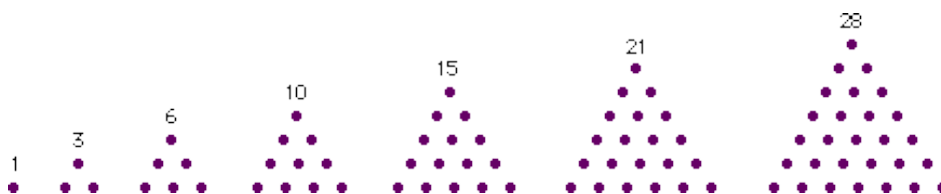


Figure Two: The series of triangular numbers.

Triangular numbers –the sequence of natural numbers 1,3,6,10,15,21, 28, etc. derived from the formula $t(n) = n(n+1)/2$ and forming a triangle when drawn using "calculi" – belong to an ancient class of figurate numbers (Figure Two). Because they establish a connection between the visible world of geometry and the

suprasensible world of pure number, figurate numbers – including square, triangular, cubic and pyramidal numbers – had been central to Pythagorean doctrine for many centuries.

As the eleventh in the sequence of triangular numbers, 66 exhibits a novel characteristic that could not have escaped the attention of Renaissance number theorists: As a palindromic – reversible – number it belongs to a very small list of numbers that are both triangular and reversible. Of triangular numbers with bases from 10-100, only 5 others – 55, 171, 595, 666, and 3003 – are also palindromic. Of these, only 66 and 3003 share the most unique characteristic of all: they are not only palindromic in themselves, but also derived from palindromic bases (11 and 77). It is accordingly striking to discover that the total number of lines in Peacham's work, 3003 (Figure Three), belongs, with 66, to this select list of palindromic triangular numbers derived from triangular bases.

Book/Author	Verse Type	Total lines
Carmen Panegyricum/ HP	Latin dactylic hexameter	66
Anon	Latin dactylic hexameter	16 (2x8)
Thomas Hardingus	Latin iambic hexameter	24 (3x8)
Hannibal Ursinus Neapolitanus	Latin dactylic hexameter	8
Italian verse Giovan: Batista Casella	???	30 (5x6)
French sonnet N.M Fortunaius	Iambic pentameter ?	14 (2x7)
English Sonnet Thomas Heywood	Iambic pentameter	12 (2x6)

English Sonnet William Segar	Iambic pentameter	30 (5x6)
English Sonnet E.S.	Iambic pentameter	14 (2x7)
Totals from Introductory matter, book I		214
Total of Book I Emblems	Iambic pentameter	1214
Book II		
Introductory English verses HP	Iambic pentameter	35 (7x5)
Total of Book II Emblems HP	Iambic pentameter	1360
Author's Conclusion HP	Iambic tetrameter	180
Totals		
Book I		1428
Book II		1575
Total both books		3003

**Figure Three: Total Verse Counts for
Minerva Britanna are 3003.**

Apparently the verses forming Peacham's dedication of the work to Prince Henry serve both to announce the work's numerological theme and also form a microcosm of the entire sequence of verses, adumbrating the figurative form of the whole.

Confirming the existence of this structure, the numbers 11, 66, and 77 are repeated in various, sometimes subtle ways, both structurally and visually, in

Peacham's book, through visual puns designed to invoke the "double-take, like the flash of insight followed by intellectual comprehension that occurs in solving a riddle."³²



Figure Four: VI VI on the title page of Minerva Britannica.

A striking example is Peacham's visual invocation of the Roman numerals VI VI on the title page of the work (Figure Four), an iconic pun created by splitting the word VIVI=TUR (he lives) into two frames of the scrollwork. The pun foreshadows the 66 lines of Peacham's exordium to Prince Henry, as well as the triangular/pyramidal form of the entire work. Indeed, analysis reveals that Peacham's book is organized principally through the complex iteration of Pythagorean triangular numbers, based on the syllogism 11:66::77:3003.³³

According to Alistair Fowler, the figure of the triangular number was considered an expression of the monumental form *par excellence*: the series was a common topic of arithmology, one "embodying the ancient ideal of poetry as memorial,"³⁴ invoked in works "intended to function as a monument...[and] especially appropriate for elegies and epitaphs."³⁵ Peacham, it would appear, conceived of *Minerva Britannica* as a contribution to the *paragon* – the contest – between monumental architecture and poetry, a debate memorialized in Horace's lyrical 1st centry (BCE) boast:

Exegi monumentum aere perennius
Regalique situ pyramidum altius.
[I have built a monument more lasting than bronze,
Higher than the pyramids of the royal place] ³⁶
(3.30)

The figure of the pyramid embodied in the triangular number sequence supplied an esoteric model suitable for Peacham's purposes of composing a work of enduring aesthetic value for his royal patron. By employing the construct of triangular numbers to provide a mathematical unity to his work, Peacham replicates his own overt statement, that although

Pyramis [is] the worldes great wonderment
[and] is of their fame, some lasting Moniment.
(E2v)

Yet,

Wise wordes taught, in numbers sweete to runne,
Preserved by the living muse for aie,
Shall still abide, when date of [monuments] is done.
(Z2v)

As his intervention in this argument the emblemist arranged his "wise words," taught "in numbers sweete to runne," in the form of a pyramid, composing the conflict by endorsing both antecedent propositions, not only affirming Horace's boast of the virtue of lyric, but simultaneously paying homage to the "competing" architectural tradition of the monumental pyramid. In short, Peacham resolved the literary with the pictorial, the lyrical with architectural, in a single aesthetic triumph – dedicated to the Protestant, nationalist cult of Prince Henry (1594-1612), at its apogee in 1611 right before Henry's untimely death.

Through the arrangement of verses and emblems, Peacham replicates the structure of the entire sequence, affirming his belief in the ancient Platonic and Pythagorean principles, *as above, so below*, and *as in the macrocosm, so in the microcosm*. While the majority of the emblem superscripts follow a conventional pattern of having two stanzas of six lines each (again, duplicating the VI VI of the title page the 66 of Peacham's exordium), a few have subscripts of 6, 14, 18, or 21 lines, and one – the subscript to 185 (Figure Five) – consists of eleven stanzas of seven lines each.



Figure Five: Peacham's "Rura mihi et silentium" emblem.

The 77 lines of verse restate in microcosm the numerical structure of the whole, "keying" the Pythagorean symbolism of *Minerva Britannia*. That this structural anomaly is not coincidental is confirmed by the subscript's coy allusion to "The rules of NVMBRING" which were "for the greatest part...first devis'd by Country Swaines" and "still the Art with them entire remains" (Cc3). A sidenote from Aristotle underscores the microcosm-macrocosm analogy: "θι θαυμαζον in re minima esse pulchre dixit"/ "he says it to be a beautiful thing to be amazed (θι θαυμαζον) by something in its smallest aspect" (Cc3). The superscript, which invokes a pastoral literary tradition as old as Theocritus, says "the rural life – and silence – is for me."

According to Maren-Sofie Røstvig, no 17th century literary theme "was more popular than the praise of the happiness of country life,"³⁷ and throughout Peacham's book the moral superiority of the country – contrasted to courts and cities – is emphasized, as in the exposition to emblem 185:

Wert thou thy life at libertie to choose,
And as thy birth, so hadst thy being free,
The City thou shouldst bid adieu, my Muse,
And from her streetes, as her infection flee....
(Cc2v)

But while Peacham contrasts court and country in conventional terms, the contrast is complicated through the repeated invocation of the idea of *ascent* and the

analogy of the court as a pyramid and Peacham's covert linkage of this symbolism to his underlying numerical schema. The subscript to emblem 185, dedicated to the virtues of country life, unexpectedly concludes:

Content thy selfe, till thine Abillitie,
And better hap, shall answer thy desire,
But muse beware, *least we too high aspire.*

(Cc3v: emphasis added)³⁸

Peacham's antidote to the ambitious impulses that lead to political disaster at court is spiritual purification through ascent, a widely influential consideration of Medieval aesthetics, rooted in Neo-Platonic, Kabbalistic, and Christian sources. Mystics of all three traditions shared the common goal of facilitating the ascent and union of the soul with God or The One. In the words of Gershom G. Scholem, "the earliest Jewish mystics...speak of the ascent of the soul to the Celestial Throne, where it obtains an ecstatic view of the majesty of God and the secrets of His Realm."³⁹ For Plotinus, the rungs on the soul's ladder of ascent are comparable to the stages of initiation into a mystery religion. The metaphor became widely accessible to a Christian readership through Boethius, who exposes the connection between the doctrine of ascent and the Platonic ideal of memory or "return": His exhortation to "Let us now *raise our minds as high as we can towards the high roof of the highest intelligence*" is explained by personified Wisdom: "so that you may most speedily and easily come to your own home from where you previously came."⁴⁰ Numerous ancient and Medieval philosophers, moreover, connected the ideal of the soul's ascent with the specifically arithmetical traditions of the Quadrivium.⁴¹ According to Glen Wegge, Censorinus, Plotinus, and Martianus Capella all "agree that the mathematical, which include music, are vital for the ascent of the soul."⁴²

It seems apparent, from independent, converging lines of evidence including the prior probabilities established by the wide currency of the aesthetic ideals of so many early modern and Medieval arts theorists and the more direct evidence of Peacham's own book, that Peacham has utilized as a numerical template *both* of the only two sets of palindromic triangular numbers: 11-66 and 77-3003. Given the singular numerological significance of both sets, it strains credibility to suppose that this structure can be attributed to coincidence. Instead, the structure of *Minerva Britanna* would appear to be a superlative expression of the author's confessed "addiction" to the ideals of "proportion and number." It appears that Peacham found the relationship between 77 and the theme of ascent already preformed in renaissance arithmology. In number symbolism since the scholastics, 77, although more generally known as the number of generations from Adam to Christ, had acquired the typological significance of the number of steps in the ascent to the godhead. According to Hugo St. Victor, the number itself symbolizes spiritual ascent through the remission of sins: "gradus significant, quod in Evangelio de remissione peccatorum dicitur: 'septuagies septies'...Septuaginta septem ergo universam transgressionem significant, quae hic ascendentibus relaxatur" / "the steps mean the

same as that which the evangelist [Matthew] has said regarding the remission of sins: 77 therefore signifies universal transgression, which by ascending produces the mitigation of sin.”⁴³

The ideal of anagogic ascent is partially masked in Peacham’s book by the direct invocation of the *sensus allegoricus*, in which social climbing takes the place of the ascent to the Godhead. This theme is stated pictographically in emblem 201, which construes the court as precarious pyramid thronged with social climbers (Figure Seven).⁴⁴

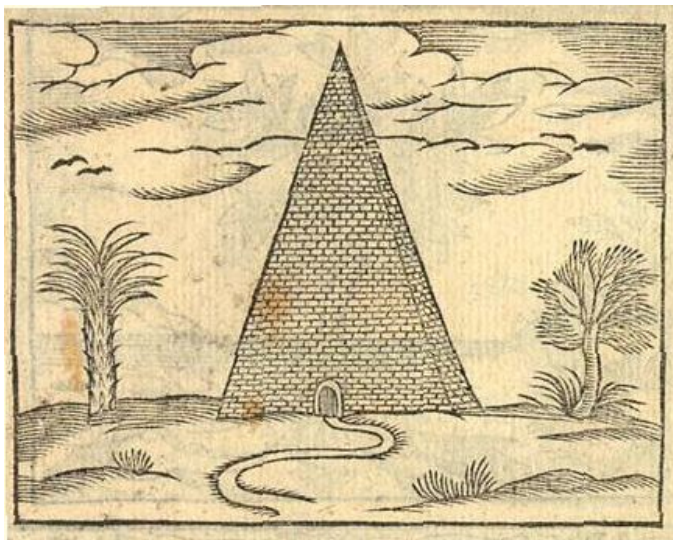


Figure Seven: ‘Minimus in summo’ (slightest at the top) (201).

Pointed with the superscript, “*minimus in summo*” (slightest at the top), the emblem draws on the conventional analogy between the pyramid and the Jacobean social hierarchy, moralizing that “how much higher thou art plac’d in sight/so much the lesse affect thy state and might,” since honors “lend Ambition wing” (Ee2v). Implicitly comparing the stratospheric world of the court with the peak of the pyramid, the emblem warns the courtly opportunist of the moral treachery of a life of power, and the ever present temptation to recapitulate the myth of Icarus in the key of courtly life.

Numerical structure is only the most abstract and well-concealed of several modes of unity in *Minerva Britannia*. If Peacham’s title alludes to the dominant emblematic traditions of Minerva, then there is reason to suspect that another extended theme of Peacham’s book is hermetic knowledge. Long associated with the topoi of “arms and art”⁴⁵ by the time of Alciat, she could stand for the principle “*Prudens magis quam loquax*”⁴⁶– “prudence should take precedence over rash speech.” Alciat’s influential *Diverse impresa* (1551) associates Minerva with “*prudentia*,” advising that “*al prudente non convengono multi parole*”/ “the prudent do not make use of too many words,” and “*Saggio chi poco parla, e multo tace*”/ “He is wise who speaks little and is often silent.”



Figure Eight: Comparison of Alciat's Biii (prudence) with Peacham's 1 (*Nisi disuper/unless from above*).

The influence of Alciat's emblem on Peacham's book is evident by comparing the first emblem of *Minerva Britanna* with Alciat's Minerva emblem (Figure Eight): both employ as background a maritime landscape with ships at sunrise/sunset. Both emblems also concern the source of contested authority; Peacham's overt gesture of deference to triumphal royal authority is shadowed – and, it seems likely, *problematized* – by Alciat's location of authority in the prudent exercise of human wisdom and discretion, the ancient ideal of *initiatory*, concealed knowledge. Not coincidentally, among the principles of the Pythagorean sect of mathematical adepts was a vow of silence, which represented not only self discipline, but a commitment to the suprasensible world of numeration and a frankly elitist view of knowledge. Such an emphasis on concealed knowledge is consistent with the well understood influence of neo-Platonic epistemology on the emblem book tradition, as E.H. Gombrich⁴⁷ and others have described it, and is a theme reflected in several of Peacham's emblems, including 156, *silentii dignitas*, which depicts the Athenian sage Solon, the prototype of the wise man, cutting his own tongue out. It is glossed with the subscript, echoing Alciat's Minerva emblem, that "of silence never any yet complained/ or could say justly it had done him wrong/Who knowes to speak, and when to hold his peace/ Findes fewest dangers, and lives best at ease."⁴⁸

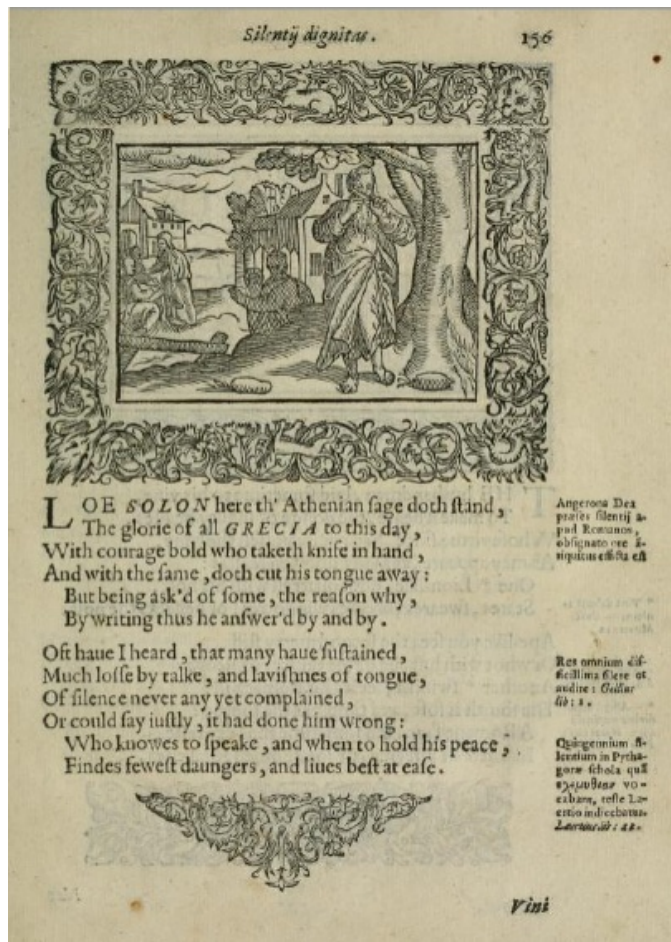


Figure Nine: Solon cutting out his own tongue in Peacham's *Minerva Britannia*.

In case we need any reminding, Peacham's sidenote to the emblem declares: "Quingennium silentium in Pythagoræ schola quam εχεμυθίαν vocabant, teste Laertio indicabatur"/In the school of Pythagoras they did not speak for five years, which they called 'holding one's peace,' as Laertio reveals."

Although the present paper cannot elaborate the larger implications of the complex, multi-dimensional symbolism of *Minerva Britannia* it has shown that Peacham's book is built upon a concealed numerical structure, utilizing the Pythagorean principle of triangular numbers. This numerical structure, it has been

argued, constitutes an expression of Peacham's *tour de force* reconciliation of the ancient paragon between poetry and architectural form. On this view, Peacham's work is representative of a definite Stuart trend, which continued throughout the century, towards poetic forms conceived under the strong influence of the pictorial arts, in which form "harmonically" restated or confirmed content. The increasingly formal verse structures of the period, represented in such pictorial poems as George Herbert's "The Altar," expressed a growing desire to "compress as much meaning into a poem as possible" (Røstvig 202) by invoking forms commensurate with their contents. As an expression of this trend – one deeply rooted, as we have seen, in principles of Arithmology stretching back over many centuries of artistic expression and boasting theoretical exposition in Boethius, the Bible, and Pythagoras – it is perhaps not surprising that *Minerva* should be organized around a subliminal but coherent numerical schema. The device not only communicates Peacham's mystical affirmation of the Pythagorean doctrine, that all things are composed of number, but also reiterates, through its concealed design and esoteric symbolism, a preoccupation with the Renaissance ideal of the monumental and memorializing function of literature.

Like other Renaissance emblematisers, Henry Peacham apparently drew inspiration from Neo-Platonic doctrines of the higher order of invisible knowledge embodied in principles concealed from the unsophisticated. He wrestled with the ancient debate over which of the arts was the "best," and not only gave, but illustrated, an answer familiar to other Renaissance arts theorists: the best art was the one which most successfully imitated the others. But he also subscribed to the doctrine of poetic glory, believing that poetry constituted a form of memorial, honoring both dedicatee and author by embodying lasting values in abstract form. His dedicatory verses to Prince Henry, "ad Augustissim[um] et Longe Nobilissimum Henricum Walliae Principem," conclude with the ringing promise of a new Golden Age of British imperialism that Peacham prophesies (*vaticinor*) will last until Henry's rule extends wider than the world itself (*toto regnabis latius orbe*). Ironically, within months Peacham's dedicatee was dead; the cult of the Elizabethan revival that had grown up around him, of which *Minerva Britannia* constitutes an outstanding exemplification, was forced to accommodate to a new age of growing Stuart absolutism, and Peacham's living forms were relegated to the historical museum of misunderstood curiosities.



Appendix A

Ex puris Iambis. Ad eundem.

Iniquus aestimator ille ducitur
Suo metitur omne qui modo ac pede;
Sapitque perparum ille, cui nihil sapit,
Nisi quod approbatur a sua nota.
At aequus ille, quisquis addit ipsius
Opinioni, acutioris arbitri
probationem, et acre testimonium,
Et eius, et suis videns ocellulis.
Peritiorum amica testimonia
Habes, labore de tuo probissimo;
Nec illa pauca, laude te ferentium
Ad astra, sicut hoc meretur inclitum
Opus. Mihi nec est opus quid amplius
Loqui, quasi adderem mari meas aquas;
Tamen quod ipse postulas, ego libens
Eos sequor, meumque iungo calculum.
PECHAME perge fausto ut incipis pede
Et ede plura, lividumque ZOILUM,
Malumque virus huius invidentiae
Teruntio valet, cuncta qui potest,
Placere non potest ei, ipse IVPITER;
Nihil morare candidum lapillulum,
Nigrumque faecis infimae, places quibus
Sat est placere, doctioribus viis.

.

THO: HARDINGVS.

Appendix B:

The Sequence of Triangular Numbers and Bases

2	3	41	861
3	6	42	903
4	10	43	946
5	15	44	990
6	21	45	1035
7	28	46	1081
8	36	47	1128
9	45	48	1176
10	55	49	1225
11	66	50	1275
12	78	51	1326
13	91	52	1378
14	105	53	1431
15	120	54	1485
16	136	55	1540
17	153	56	1596
18	171	57	1653
19	190	58	1711
20	210	59	1770
21	231	60	1830
22	253	61	1891
23	276	62	1953
24	300	63	2016
25	325	64	2080
26	351	65	2145
27	378	66	2211
28	406	67	2278
29	435	68	2346
30	465	69	2415
31	496	70	2485
32	528	71	2556
33	561	72	2628
34	595	73	2701
35	630	74	2775
36	666	75	2850
37	703	76	2926
39	780	77	3003
40	820		

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Endnotes

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- ² Forty-four emblems are dedicated to named individuals (including one to Jesus Christ, one to Peacham himself, and four to King James).
- ³ See the title page reproduction on xvii, this issue.
- ⁴ Mason Tung, "From Mirror to Emblem: A Study of Peacham's Use of *Microkosmos* in *Minerva Britannia*," *Word and Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Inquiry*. 5 (1989): 326-332; "From Personifications to Emblems: A Study of Peacham's Use of Ripa's *Iconologia* in *Minerva Britannia*," *The English Emblem and the Continental Tradition*. Ed. By Peter M. Daly New York: AMS, 1988. 109-150; "From Impresa to Emblem: Peacham's Use of Typotius's *Symbola* and other Impresa Collections in *Minerva Britannia*," *Emblematica: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Emblem Studies*. 3 (1988) 79-100; "Fables in Emblems: A Study of Peacham's Use of Aesop and Aesopics in *Minerva Britannia*," *Studies in Iconography*. 12 (1988): 43-60; "From Heraldry to Emblem: A study of Peacham's Use of Heraldic Arms in *Minerva Britannia*" *Word and Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Inquiry*. 3 (1987): 86-94; "A List of Flora and Fauna in Peacham's *Minerva Britannia* and Acliati's *Emblemata* Together with Possible Models in Contemporary Illustrations," *Emblematica: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Studies* 1 (1986) 345-57; "From Theory to Practice: A Study of the Theoretical Bases of Peacham's Emblematic Art," *Studies in Iconography*, 18 (1997) 187-219.
- ⁵ Alan Young, *The English Emblem Tradition 5: Henry Peacham's Manuscript Emblem Books* (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1998), xiv.
- ⁶ Peter Daley, *English Emblem Tradition*, 36. This is an excellent comprehensive introduction to scholarship of the emblem book genre and its implications for Renaissance literary studies.
- ⁷ E.H. Gombrich, "ICONES SYMBOLICAE: The Visual Image in Neo-Platonic Thought," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 1948 (11), 163-92, 163.
- ⁸ Gombrich, 165.
- ⁹ Milton Klonsky (ed), *Speaking Pictures: A Gallery of Pictorial Poetry from the Sixteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Harmony Books, 1975), 5.

- ¹⁰ Andreas Alciat, the Italian lawyer and arts theorist who produced the first emblem book in the European tradition, *Viri Clarissimi D. Andreae Alciati Iurisconsultiss. Mediol. Ad D. Chonradum Peutingenum Augustanum, Iurisconsultum Emblematum Liber* (Augsburg, 1531).
- ¹¹ Translation by the University of Glasgow online editions.
- ¹² S.K. Heninger, "Some Renaissance Versions of the Pythagorean Tetrad," *Studies in the Renaissance*, 8 (1961), 7-35, 11, n. 24.
- ¹³ See, e.g., R.G. Peterson, "Critical Calculations: Measure and Symmetry in Literature," *PMLA*, 91:3 (May, 1976), 367-75, 370.
- ¹⁴ John MacQueen. *Numerology: Theory and Outline History of a Literary Mode*. (Edinburgh: The University Press, 1985), 2.
- ¹⁵ MacQueen, 5.
- ¹⁶ Ernst Robert Curtius. *European Literature and the Middle Ages* (Princeton: University Press Bollingen Series, 1990 reprint of 1953), 508.
- ¹⁷ Maren-Sofie Røstvig, "Renaissance Numerology: Acrostics or Criticism." *Essays in Criticism* 16 (1966), 6-21.
- ¹⁸ Rosalie L. Colie, "Triumphal Forms: Structural Patterns in Elizabethan Poetry," *Modern Philology*, 71:1 (Aug., 1973), 76-79, 77.
- ¹⁹ Leon Battista Alberti, *De Re Aedificatoria*, ix, 5; cited in Mark Rose, *Shakespearean Design* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 16.
- ²⁰ Heninger supplies a bibliography at 34-35.
- ²¹ Philemon Holland, *The Philosophie, commonlie called, the morals written by the learned philosopher Plutarch of Chaeronea. Translated out of the Greeke into English, and conferred with the Latine Translations and the French, by Philemon Holland of Coventrie, Doctor in Physicke. Whereunto are annexed the summaries necessary to be read before every treatise*. London: Printed by Arnold Hatfield, 1603, 806, Yyyr.
- ²² Wisdom, XI, 20.
- ²³ F.G. Waldron, "Dispersed Poems By Spenser; Not in Any Edition of His Works," in *The Literary Museum; Or, Ancient and Modern Repository. Comprising Scarce and Curious tracts, Poetry, Biography, and Criticism* (London: Printed for the editor, 1792), 9-12.
- ²⁴ Robert Ralston Cawley, *Henry Peacham: His Contribution to English Poetry*. 1971, 41; emphasis supplied.
- ²⁵ E.g., Peterson, R.G. "Critical Calculations: Measure and Symmetry in Literature," *PMLA*, 91:3 (May, 1976): 367-75, 370.
- ²⁶ *Ekphrasis* is defined as the graphic, often dramatic, description of a visual work of art. Among the most famous ekphrastic passages in literary history is Homer's description of Achilles' shield in book 18 of *The Iliad*.
- ²⁷ Peacham, B1v.
- ²⁸ *Calculus ponere*: "put the stone [on the counting-board]," i.e., "settle accounts," "come to a reckoning" (Andrewes 225). Penny McCarthy has kindly noted that *calculus* is also the word for a voting pebble, so that Harding's reference

can also be translated “and add *my vote* (of approval) to theirs.” Although this is a satisfying first reading of the line, the elaborate numerical language of the entire poem suggests the presence of a conceit that goes beyond such a conventional expression of approval.

²⁹ Harding’s familiarity with the Thracian tradition recorded by Pliny (6.11) of memorializing fortunate occurrences with a white (*candidum*) calculus and unfortunate ones with a black (*nigrum*) one is attested in his use of these very terms in the concluding stanza.

³⁰ Although the triangular sequence constitutes the dominant structural principle of *Minerva Britannia*, it is not Peacham’s only use of number to impart structure. I am indebted to Lynne Kositsky for the observation that the “Authors Conclusion” that completes the book’s sequence of verses is composed of 22 ½ stanzas of 8, for a total of 180 lines of verse. Unlike the book as a whole, this sequence follows the typical Renaissance pattern of being organized around a symmetrical center that replicates the circular metaphor implied in a verse total of 180, replicating in its structure the circular symbolism of an ekphrastic Garter necklace worn by a Queen seated in a “circlet round”:

Within there was a Circlet round,	73
That rais’d it selfe, of softest grasse,	74
No Velvet smoother spred on ground,	75
Or Em’rald greener ever was:	76
In mid’st there sate a beauteous Dame,	77
(Not PAPHOS Queene so faire a wight)	78
For Roses by, did blush for shame,	79
To see a purer, red and white.	80

In Robe of woven Silver fine,	81
And deepest Crimson she was clad:	82
Then diaper’d with golden twine,	83
Aloft a Mantle greene she had,	84
Whereon were wrought, with rarest skill	85
Faire Cities, Castles, Rivers, Woods;	86
And here, and there, embossed a hill	87
With Fountaines, and the Nymphes of Floods.	88

A massie Collar set with stones,	89
Did over all, it self extend	90
Whereon in sparkling Diamonds,	91
SAINT GEORGE, her Patrone did depend	92

The “beauteous dame,” perhaps a personification of Lady England, the late Elizabeth I, or even Minerva herself, wears a garter livery collar like that

worn by Elizabeth I in her 1558 coronation portrait. It cannot reasonably be considered a coincidence that this emblematic device is introduced precisely at the center of the 180-line sequence, an effect which is emphasized by the statement that the “beauteous dame” is seated “in the midst” of a “Circlet.”

- ³¹ This excludes the single digit series 1, 3, and 6, which are palindromic only in the most technical sense.
- ³² Milton Klonsky (ed), *Speaking Pictures: A Gallery of Pictorial Poetry from the Sixteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Harmony Books, 1975), 25.
- ³³ All of which are triangular except, of course, 11.
- ³⁴ Alistair Fowler, *Triumphal Forms: Structural patterns in Elizabethan Poetry* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1970), 188.
- ³⁵ Fowler, 188.
- ³⁶ Maren-Sofie Røstvig, “Andrew Marvell and the Caroline Poets,” in *English Poetry and Prose 1540-1674*, edited by Christopher Ricks (London: Sphere Reference, 1986), 201-44, 201.
- ³⁷ Verbal echoes are rare in Peacham’s book, and yet the same paranomasic fear, of “aspiring” too high, also occurs in emblem 142: “But ah I feare me, I too high aspire” (X1) as well as being repeated in the concluding emblem (206) of the series.
- ³⁸ Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1946), 5.
- ³⁹ Boethius, *De consolazione philosophiae* 146.26-9; emphasis supplied.
- ⁴⁰ The four elements of the quadrivium were defined as “number itself (arithmetic), number in relations (music); and quantity, which may be studied at rest (geometry) and in motion (astronomy)” (Wagner 153).
- ⁴¹ Glen Wegge, “The Relationship between Neo-Platonic Aesthetics and Early Medieval Music Theory: The Ascent to the One (Part 3),” *Music Theory Resources*, 2:1 (summer 2001).Web, 2.
- ⁴² Heinz Meyer and Rudolf Suntrup, *Lexicon Der Mittelalterlichen Zahlenbedeutungen*. München: Wilhelm Fink, 1987, 768. The chief scholastic theorist of the divine ascent was St. Bonaventure (1221-74): “we are so created that the material universe itself is a ladder by which we may ascend to God.... Now since it is necessary to ascend before we can descend on Jacob’s ladder, let us place our first step in the ascent at the bottom, setting the whole visible world before us as a mirror through which we may pass over to God, the Supreme Creative Artist...” (chapter 1).
- ⁴³ Cf. also, Emblem 21, dedicated to William, Earl of Pembroke, to whom the Shakespeare First Folio would in 1623 also be dedicated, which construes the pyramid as an emblem of the “glory of princes” endowed with “glorious proiectes of the mind” (E2v), and *Minerva’s* third comparable *topos* of monumental architecture, the Colossus at Rhodes (161).
- ⁴⁴ See, for example, Henkel, Von Arthur & Albrecht Schöne. *Emblemata: Handbuch Zur Sinnbildkunst Des XVI. Und XVII Jahrhunderts*. (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche

Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1953), An. S. 104, p. 1735.

⁴⁵ John Manning, *The Emblem*. London: Reaktion Books, 2004, 239.

⁴⁶ According to Gombrich, before the dawn of the Age of Reason, “preceding centuries were not worried by the apparent paradox of an art invented to convey a message in symbols which seemed to become more obscure the triter the meaning they were supposed both to hide and reveal” (162).... “to the Neo-Platonic philosophers the conception of an inherent and essential symbolism pervading the order of things offered a key to the whole universe” (168).

⁴⁷ Peacham overtly acknowledges the occult tradition even on the title page of his book, which invokes the figure of enigma, depicting a concealed author behind a theatrical discovery space writing the words “mente videbor/by the mind I shall be revealed” (see note 3). Emblem 38 (G3), depicting a winged key, is glossed by the subscript as testimony that

The waightie counsels, and affaires of state,
The wider mannadge, with such cunning skill,
Though long lockt up, at laste abide the fate
Of common censure, either good or ill:
And greatest secrets, though they hidden lie,
Abroad at last, with swiftest wing they flie.
(G3)

This emblem unites two themes, that of concealed knowledge – specifically the *arcana imperium* and *domesticum* of courts and kings – and that of the country-court dichotomy, through an equivocation on “abroad,” a word compressing the two meanings, “freely moving about...out of doors, out in the open air” (OED 2./3., 9) with “Out of the home country; in or into foreign lands” (4., 9).

⁴⁸ Peacham’s emblem 177, dedicated to himself, echoes his verbal remark of his own addiction to “the science of proportion.” It depicts Urania, wearing a dress decorated with stars and holding a model of the globe in one hand and a staff in the other, pointing with her staff to the stars. The superscript, a Latin anagram on Peacham’s own name, reads “Hinc super haec, Musa” – “Muse, hither above these” (Bb2v). With this astronomical perspective in mind, it may be interesting to recall the semiotic function of the triangle in Renaissance cosmology. According to Johannes Sarabosco’s *Tractatus de Sphaera* (c. 1230), a book that remained the standard 16th century handbook of cosmology, a celestial sign or constellation should be viewed as a pyramid “whose equilateral base is that surface which we call a ‘sign’ whilst its apex is at the centre of the earth” (cited in Røstvig 221).