Proverbs and emblems share a common feature: the use of metaphors and images. Proverbs, or pithy sayings in general use that express some worldly wisdom or moral lesson, are usually informed by imagery. Erasmus, whose discussion of ancient proverbs in the *Adagia* has no equal in classical or Renaissance literature, took a somewhat broader view. According to him, not all proverbs convey a moral, nor are they necessarily couched in metaphors. In his famous definition, they are sayings in common use, remarkable for some shrewd and novel turn (‘Paroemia est celebre dictum scita quapiam novitate insigne’). The ‘novel turn’ is mainly a question of style and figurative speech. Addressing the question as to how novelty is achieved he lists a number of factors. Some proverbs, he says, owe their novelty to the matter represented (‘ipsa res’). The example he gives is ‘weeping crocodile tears’ (‘crocodyli lachrimae’): a crocodile shedding tears would be a strange and curious phenomenon. Other proverbs owe their novelty to the use of metaphors or allegory, of hyperbole and enigma. An example of the last category is ‘The half is more than the whole’ (‘Dimidium plus toto’). Some proverbs depend on *allusio* (a ‘veiled reference’): they allude to a line or passage from a well-known author. Another feature...
is semantic ambiguity or **double entendre**. The next factor mentioned is ‘novelty of phrasing’ (‘ipsa eloquendi novitas’) – a very general and unspecific description. The example he provides is ‘Without Ceres and Bacchus Venus gets cold’ (‘Sine Cerere et Baccho friget Venus’). Surprisingly, he does not employ the term metonymy. Novelty is also achieved through antiquity (**antiquitas**), when the remote origin of a proverb imbues it with a certain archaic flavour. The example given is a maxim ascribed to the venerable Seven Sages. Lastly, he mentions humour and wit (**ridiculum**).

Evidently, proverbs lend themselves to being incorporated into emblems. Proverbs and maxims in general were a source of inspiration for emblem writers. Andrea Alciato, whose collection of emblems entitled **Emblemata** marked the beginning of the emblem mania (1531), employed Erasmus’ **Adagia** for a few poems. Gilles Corrozet, with Guillaume de la Perrière the first practitioner of the genre in France, advertised his emblem book to the public by referring to apophthegms, proverbs, and maxims on the very title-page.

As regards Alciato and Erasmus, two points need to be made. Firstly, while they certainly admired each other’s works, their relationship cannot be described in terms of friendship and cooperation. It was Bonifatius Amerbach who acted as intermediary from 1519. Erasmus mentioned only a few treatises from Alciato’s numerous works,

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