A ZOOLOGICAL EMBLEM BOOK:
WILLEM VAN DER BORCHT’S SEDIGHE
SINNE-BEELDEN (1642)

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Introduction

Animals were a very popular topic in sixteenth and seventeenth-century emblem books. Their characteristics and behavior, their mythological and Christian connotations all provided ample opportunity for moralizing comments, a prominent part of many an emblem book. In most cases, the animal-based emblems are scattered throughout the emblem book and often the animals in the *picturae* are accompanied by humans, other animals or one or more attributes. Some emblem books, however, focus exclusively on animals. This is the case in Willem van der Borcht’s *Sedighe Sinne-beelden op den aerdt der Ghepluymde, Vier-voetighe, Waterighe, Ghekorven, (oft) Bloedeloose Dieren (Moral emblems on the nature of feathered, four-footed, aquatic, articulate or bloodless animals)*, published in Brussels in 1642 [Fig. 1]. 1 In this paper I will argue that, both in structural composition and thematic focus, Van der Borcht’s emblem book belongs to the emblematic sub-genre of zoological emblem books. I will then demonstrate how, in writing the *Sedighe Sinne-beelden*, Van der Borcht was inspired by a more scientific, zoological work written some three years before the *Sedighe Sinne-beelden*. In the last part of this paper, I will focus on a number of *picturae* in the *Sedighe Sinne-beelden* which are clearly inspired by the tradition of illustrated fable books.

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1 *Sedighe Sinne-beelden op den aerdt der Ghepluymde, Vier-voetighe, Waterighe, Ghekorven, (oft) Bloedeloose Dieren. To Brussel, By Ian Mommaert, achter 't Stadt-huyss, in de Druckerye. M.DC. XLIII.* I managed to trace only two copies of this edition: one in the British Library (shelfmark 12305.aa.16.), the other in the Herzog August Library in Wolfenbüttel (shelfmark A: 167.5 Eth.).
The *Sedighe Sinne-beelden* is a collection of 75 emblems in sedecimo oblong format. The emblems all feature a woodcut depicting an animal, a title naming the animal, a motto, and two short texts, one in verse and one in prose. They are preceded by two dedications to Willem van Blitterswyck, an explanation of the frontispiece and a general prologue to the emblems. The book was published in Brussels by Jan Mommaert in 1642. The emblems are divided into 4 chapters, each

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2 Willem van Blitterswyck, a Brussels lawyer, magistrate and writer, was acquainted with Mommaert, who published one of his works. Whether he had introduced Van der Borcht to Van Blitterswyck is uncertain, but the fact that they knew each other is beyond any doubt. In one of the dedicatory poems to Van Blitterswyck, Van der Borcht presents his work as a new year’s present to Van Blitterswyck and thanks him for the ‘usual favor in your residence’ (‘gewoonelycke gunste t’uwen huysse’; fol. A6v). On Van Blitterswyck see Bibliographie Nationale (Brussels: s.d.) 2 (1868) 481–483.