

## CARL GUSTAV CARUS' EMBLEMATIC THINKING\*

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Carl Gustav Carus (1789–1869), a late German Romantic, was a man of many and varied talents, a scientist, a professor of medicine, specifically of gynaecology, in Leipzig and in Dresden, where he was later appointed court physician to the Saxon royal family. He wrote pioneering scientific and medical textbooks, especially in the field of comparative anatomy. As a skilled draughtsman, he illustrated his anatomical treatises with his own engravings, and year by year he exhibited his own landscapes and allegorical paintings in the Dresden Academy. He wrote critical works on art, literature and music, was the friend of the Dresden Romantics, Tieck, Carl Maria von Weber, and especially Caspar David Friedrich, whose personal physician he was and with whom he shared painting expeditions to the Baltic islands. He was, too, the disciple of Goethe who thought highly of his anatomical studies and also of his scientifically informed theory and practice of landscape painting, which he associated with the study of geology, of plant life and of light.<sup>1</sup>

What linked Goethe and Carus was the desire to explore, analyse and actually to illustrate the links between scientific, artistic, and psychological phenomena as forming one single organic whole. A preoccupation of this kind readily lends itself to symbolic thinking. I am concerned here with the way in which the emblem habit, a historical and time-bound literary, artistic, and ethical phenomenon of the late Renaissance, was revived among German Romantics in the early part of the nineteenth century in a variety of ways. There was first of all, as in late German Romanticism, a straightforward antiquarianism, the direct use, republication and imitation of emblems and of actual emblem books, as in the case of Brentano and to a lesser extent

\* This essay is based on a paper read at the First International Conference for Emblem Studies in Glasgow, August 1987.

<sup>1</sup> For a general account of Carus, especially also of his scientific work and a full bibliography, see Heinz-Egon Kleine-Natrop, 'Carl Gustav Carus: Ausgewählte Aspekte seines Lebens hundert Jahre nach seinem Tod', *Nova Acta Leopoldina*, new series 36, No. 198 (1969), 199–247. For Carus as an artist, see Marianne Prause, *Carl Gustav Carus: Leben und Werk* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1968), which includes an illustrated catalogue of his work. For Carus as an art critic and writer, see Elisabeth Stopp, 'Carus' *Neun Briefe über Landschaftsmalerei* (1831): Werk und Form in romantischer Perspektive', *Aurora*, 43 (1983), 77–91.

of Görres and Eichendorff.<sup>2</sup> There was also the more restricted, less immediately imitative, but nevertheless clever revival of emblematic attitudes linked with known and specific emblems. Carus can be fitted into this latter category.

Peter Daly has called Germanists to order and firmly put them on their guard in the matter of reading vague emblematic affinities and attitudes into Goethe's literary and scientific work and demonstrated how this is all too easily done.<sup>3</sup> As a non-specialist in emblematics I have taken his strictures to heart and have been, as I hope, suitably cautious in attributing emblematic thinking two or three centuries after this form and habit actually flourished. I want to discuss two incidents in Carus' psychological experience when emblematic images were important in shaping and crystallizing his life-long attitudes as a scientific thinker and as a physician. He also used symbolical topoi, familiar in emblems, in his own allegorical paintings, especially in a picture inspired by Goethe's death in 1832. Pictorial analogies of an emblematic nature informed, too, his understanding of Goethe's *Faust* and of his figurative language.

Carus was deeply aware of, and alive to, the link between the unconscious mind and the pictorial and sense impressions conveyed to the mind by the act of looking. This awareness informs all his scientific and critical writing. He began his now classic text-book, his anatomy, as he called it, of the human psyche, of the mind in general, with the aphorism: 'Der Schlüssel zur Erkenntnis vom Wesen des bewußten Seelenlebens liegt in der Region des Unbewußten'.<sup>4</sup> What with Freud and Jung, both of whom, but more especially Jung, were indebted to Carus, this sounds obvious enough now, but was by no means a self-evident truth in its time. Carus' analysis of the way in which sense impressions and visual images might affect conscious attitudes and decisions was new in scientific terms and as a verifiable truth. A further cognate inquiry was his work on the symbolical significance of the human body, foreshadowing Ernst Kretschmer's theories in his *Symbolik der menschlichen Gestalt* (1953). The subtle, mysterious nature of this link between the visual, the spirit, and the emotions was Carus' main and life-long preoccupation, his leitmotif, one might say, and one which invaded his own consciousness at an early stage through an emblematic medium.

At the age of five or six Carus was away from home for a year, living with his grandparents at Mülhausen, there to be tutored by an uncle. This man had been a pastor, but had then turned to the study of

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Elisabeth Stopp, "'O Stern und Blume": Its Poetic and Emblematic Context', *Modern Language Review*, 67 (1972), 95–117.

<sup>3</sup> Peter M. Daly, 'Goethe and the Emblematic Tradition', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* (1975), 388–412.

<sup>4</sup> Carl Gustav Carus, *Psyche: Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Seele* (Pforzheim: Flammer und Hofmann, 1846), based on lectures in Dresden, 1829–30.

chemistry and science; he was an impassioned pedagogue, full of ideas reflecting his dual theological and scientific training, all of which greatly stimulated his pupil's precocious intelligence. There was one train of thought more especially which remained imprinted on his mind, as he relates in his memoirs; it was that connected with the human soul in its relationship to God and as depicted in the one book he clearly remembered from that early time. This was, as he said, his favourite book

my unique and faithful companion: the ancient *Orbis Pictus* of Amos Comenius, with its curious woodcuts, its German and Latin wordlists and text, its pictures of the most varied human occupations and conditions. When I sat there turning the pages and reading, there was always *one* woodcut which enthralled me and which has the inscription 'The Human Soul'. There was a table and above it a triangle with the eye of God, then next to this the outline of a human figure, its shape and substance pictured entirely in a clustered mass of small dots. It was this mystery – and I will understand that a mystery was implied – that first directed my spirit wholly inwards: 'So you too have got a soul, or are a soul' I said to myself. This train of thought wouldn't let me go, and this idea which, in its higher connotation, is bound to remain a mystery for ever . . . was the very first notion that I still remember to this day and which I have faithfully tried to make ever clearer to myself for well over half a century now.<sup>5</sup>

In an illuminating article – and this saves me going into greater detail here – Wolfgang Harms has discussed the emblematic affinities of Comenius' *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (1658).<sup>6</sup> Comenius' 150 woodcuts and word-lists cover, as far as could be, all visible phenomena connected with man's spiritual, social, occupational life, the virtues and vices, man's origin and his immortal destiny in God, these latter groups of woodcuts being particularly 'emblematic'. The book begins with God the creator, and ends with God the judge, at the end of the world. Comenius sees the concrete world as representing ideas which are necessarily in harmony with one another because they all stem from God; he was attempting, as he said, to write and illustrate an 'anatomy of the world' in its divine setting in the universe and as inhabited by man created in God's image. Comenius thought that, in actively responding to a visible image and to names and words in a book as a commentary, the child is in contact with a medium that can reveal truth and harmony. It is clear, therefore, that Comenius is still drawing on the emblematic world-view and even, as Harms points out, on the medieval correspondence between *verbum* and *res*. In the

<sup>5</sup> Carl Gustav Carus, *Lebenserinnerungen und Denkwürdigkeiten* (4 vols., Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1865–66), i. 16.

<sup>6</sup> Wolfgang Harms, 'Wörter, Sachen und emblematische "res" im *Orbis sensualium pictus* des Comenius', in *Gedenkschrift für William Foerste*, ed. Dietrich Hofmann, assist. Willy Sanders (Cologne, Vienna: Böhlau, 1970), 531–42. See also the introduction by John E. Sadler to his facsimile edition of the 1659 English translation of the *Orbis sensualium pictus* by Charles Boole (Oxford: University Press, 1968). At one time Comenius planned a book of a hundred emblems to explain and illustrate his educational system of 'Pansophie', but the work was never published.

same tradition Comenius was also aiming to integrate image and language with moral as well as factual instruction.

Carus was writing, it seems, from a childhood memory, describing as one composite picture what, certainly in the earlier editions, was two separate pictures, namely Plate I, 'Deus, Gott' and Plate XLII, 'Anima hominis, Die Seele des Menschen'. And though a table frequently features in Comenius, as in emblems proper, for the formal display at a change of level, there is no table in either of these two pictures amalgamated in the child's mind, it would seem, because of the vital association of God with the human soul. Plate XLII (fig. 1) shows the outline of a human form, its shape and substance consisting only in a clustered mass of fine dots, the figure set against the background of a white sheet as in a shadow play; the *subscriptio*, or text, being: 'Die Seele ist des Leibes Leben, einig in dem gantzen', 'The soul is the life of the body, one in the whole'. Plate I, 'Deus', on the other hand, shows a triangle containing a circle with three identical Hebrew initials, the Trinity, as it were; rays, as of the sun, surround the whole depiction, and the *subscriptio* is 'Essentia unus, persona trinus' and 'Deus est ex seipso ab aeterno in aeternum'. A cognate woodcut, Plate CLIX, however, also shows a triangle which this time contains God's all-seeing eye and is subscribed 'Provido Dei oculo', 'Gottes allsehendes Auge'. But what matters here is that the child's composite, merged image of God's relationship to the body and soul of man had played a significant part in shaping Carus' attitude as a scientist and a thinker.

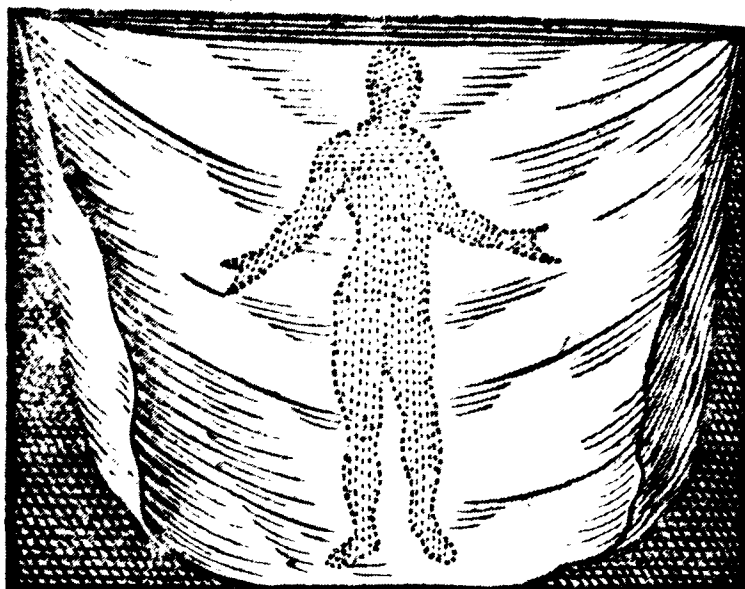
The important idea impressing itself on Carus' mind was that he as a person *had* both and *was* a soul and spirit in exactly the same way as he both *had* and *was* a body: 'Anima est corporis vita una in toto' (inscription, Plate XLII). This was the memorable emblematic tag, which, together with the striking picture, suggested to Carus a total oneness, an indissoluble body-soul unity, the nature of which, and its mystery, he would spend the rest of his life, as a physician, a scientist, and an artist, trying to understand and to describe. Associating Comenius' picture of the shadowy human creature (Plate CLII) with the all-seeing eye of God, the creator (Plates I and CLIX) is simply to put the body-soul unit into the presence of God and of the inchoate plan of the Blessed Trinity for the creation and redemption of man. This was the idea which Carus carried through his whole life and work: man as an organic, living structure which was everywhere and at the same time both body *and* soul, not a dichotomy of body over *against* soul. It was the basic tenet of his main work, *Psyche*.

His attitude towards his profession as a physician was also associated with an actual emblem which helped him to understand and come to terms with the work he had chosen to do, when the full burden of his profession was beginning to weigh on him. In his memoirs he describes how, when he was a young assistant practitioner, his senior partner at the University of Leipzig asked him to do

OS: (164):

XLII.

Die Seele des Menschen. Anima hominis.



Die Seele ist des Leibes Leben/ einig in dem ganzen:	<i>Anima f. 1.</i> <i>est corporis vita,</i>  <i>una in toto :</i>	<i>Corpus, n. 3. der Leih.</i> <i>Vita, f. 1. das Leben.</i> <i>Unus, a, um, einig.</i> <i>Totus, a, um, ganz.</i>
Allein eine Wachschümliche/ in den pflanzen; zugleich eine Sinnliche/	<i>tantum</i> <i>vegetativa,</i>  <i>in plantis;</i> <i>simul sensitiva,</i>	<i>Vegetativus, a, um,</i> <i>Wachschümlich.</i> <i>Planta, f. 1. die Pflanze.</i> <i>Sensitivus, a, um, Sinn-</i> <i>lich.</i>
in den Thieren; auch eine Vernünftige/	<i>in animalibus;</i> <i>etiam rationalis,</i>	<i>Animal, n. 3. das Thier.</i> <i>Rationalis, c. 3. e, n. 3.</i> <i>vernünftig.</i>
in dem Menschen. Diese/ bestehet in dreyen Dingen: Erstlich in der Vernunft	<i>in homine.</i> <i>Hæc, consistit</i> <i>in tribus:</i> <i>primò</i> <i>in mente</i>	<i>Homo, m. 3. der Mensch.</i> <i>Consistere, a. 3. bestehen.</i> <i>Tres, c. 3. ia, n. 3. pl. drey.</i>  <i>Mens, f. 3. die Vernunft.</i> <i>oder</i>

FIG. 1.

Johann Amos Comenius, *Orbis sensualium pictus*, 1658  
plate XLII, 'Die Seele des Menschen. Anima hominis'  
Manchester, John Rylands University Library of Manchester

a night-watch by a patient who was dangerously ill. The man's bed was surrounded by a large screen, ornamented with what Carus calls 'old Franconian paintings, all kinds of emblematic pictures ["Sinnbilder"]', each complete with its motto in large oval frames'. Carus spent the night monitoring his patient's condition and studying the emblems. There was one emblem which more particularly held his attention. It showed a man weighed down by a heavy load he was carrying, walking along with great difficulty. The motto was 'Aliis inserviando consumor', and immediately, says Carus, 'the whole onus of the profession to which I had dedicated myself seemed to step out towards me from out of this picture, prophetically enough, with its full weight and burden and difficulty'.<sup>7</sup> But as he himself explains, his intense, self-dramatizing reaction to this emblem was therapeutic in that it helped him to objectify and to see his profession more clearly, less glamorously and in proportion. Similarly he then tells how his own symbolical paintings in imitation of those of his friend and patient, Caspar David Friedrich, showing, for instance, snow-bound graveyards or monastery ruins with one lone wanderer, or a pilgrim lost in a waste of icy mountains, a solitary cross by a darkening sea, a lurid vision of the gates to Dante's *Inferno* – how all this helped him to overcome gloom and depression as he consciously translated such moods into pictorial terms. 'We have got to create a mirror-image of our moods', he said, 'make our inner struggles concrete by giving them form and structure, by putting them over against us'.<sup>8</sup> The motto on Carus' helpful emblem, 'Aliis inserviando consumor', is, it is true, usually associated with the picture of the candle burning down and with the self-sacrificing service of the king and of royalty.<sup>9</sup> Here, too, it is possible that Carus, worn out by his midnight vigil and taking as it were a young man's view of his important role as a physician, was amalgamating emblems in his memory; the experience of studying many emblems at one sitting can create a confusion familiar enough to all who have had a concentrated session with Henkel and Schöne's *Emblemata*.

Finally, I would like to turn to Carus' use of a favourite Romantic device, criticism of a work of art by imagery, by metaphor or by the analogue of art in a different medium, each unit of the comparison illuminating the other in a poetical association. In this way Tieck, for instance, sought to convey the impression and essence of Dante's *Divine Comedy* in terms of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel,<sup>10</sup> and Carus himself designed a stained glass rosette

<sup>7</sup> Carus, *Lebenserinnerungen*, i. 89.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, i. 128, and Prause, *Carl Gustav Carus*, for illustrations of such pictures with Carus' own commentary on their symbolism. The analogy with Carl Gustav Jung's emphasis on the vital healing therapy of drawings and paintings is clear.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Arthur Henkel and Albrecht Schöne, *Emblemata* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1967), 1363.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Elisabeth Stopp, 'Tieck and Dante', *Deutsches Dante Jahrbuch*, 60 (1985), 78f, and also 'Joseph Görres' Metaphorical Thinking', in *Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte: Festschrift für Richard Brinkmann*, ed. J. Brummack et al. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1981), 376f.



FIG. 2.

Carl Gustav Carus, *Allegorie auf Goethes Tod*, after 1832  
 Frankfurt am Main, Freies Deutsches Hochstift Frankfurter Goethe-  
 museum



FIG. 3.  
Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia*  
Manchester, Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester



window, an abstract design to represent the horrors of the *Inferno*. Soon after Goethe's death in 1832, an event which Carus commemorated in an allegorical painting of two white swans on dark waters set against a lyre and a gloomy sky (fig. 2), Carus wrote his *Briefe über Goethes Faust* (1835).<sup>11</sup> This was one of the earliest critical reactions to *Faust* as a whole, which was not published in its entirety until after Goethe's death. At this time Carus, a great collector, had recently acquired two of the great trio of Dürer's 1513–14 prints, the *Melencolia* (fig. 3) and *Knight, Death and the Devil*, not as well known then as they are now. Living with these prints of the 'otherwise much more tranquil and pious Dürer', this, surprisingly enough, being the accepted Romantic view of Dürer as popularized by Tieck and Wackenroder, Carus came to see the *Melencolia* as a 'meaningful parallel', 'ein sinnvolles Gleichnis', to Faust's problem, an expression of Faust's conflict in symbolical terms, a parallel 'which would help to formulate more clearly many thoughts hard to put into words'. Carus then gives a brief, admirably observed and formulated description of the constituent parts and all the symbolical objects in this enigmatic print, so central to the atmosphere of Faust's own Renaissance era and even more full of emblematic complexities than, for instance, Dürer's *Maximilian I*.<sup>12</sup> Allowing the symbols, once he has described and identified them, to speak for themselves, Carus makes no further attempt to interpret the picture as a whole; he simply points to the juxtaposition of all these features, allowing them to make their own visual impact beyond the threshold of words. He invites the reader to look closely at the print with Faust's problem and his whole career, his problem in mind. Finally, he asks a number of questions, indicating but not stating his own diagnosis, and then in a kind of commentary on the emblematic picture, a dozen lines printed in italics, he provides something like a solution by means of another picture, *Knight, Death and the Devil*, where the knight, undeterred by evil, by the thought of death and of time running out, steadily knows and follows his own right road to the castle on the hilltop. This picture points to what, in the end, saves Faust from himself and from his 'profoundly tragic and demonic longing, his unlimited desire, his passionate questioning', his undismayed endeavour wins through to ultimate salvation.

Carus' Dürer analogy was an original, valid overall, and emblematic approach to a work of art such as *Faust*; and it forms an

<sup>11</sup> Carl Gustav Carus, *Goethe: Zu dessen näherem Verständnis, und Briefe über Goethes Faust*, ed. Ernst Merian-Genest (Zürich: Rotapfel, 1948), 215–72, with reproductions of the Dürer prints. For the picture commemorating Goethe's death, see Prause, *Carl Gustav Carus*, 87.

<sup>12</sup> For an account of Dürer's three Master engravings and of *Maximilian I*, see Erwin Panofsky, *The Life of Albrecht Dürer* (fourth edition, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U.P., 1955), 151–71 and 177, illustrations 207–9 and 227. As an *inscriptio* for *Knight, Death and the Devil*, Panofsky suggests 'Non est fas respicere', 'look not behind thee', Erasmus' motto for the 'miles Christianus'.

interesting literary parallel to his personal approach to emblematic thinking in the instances described from Comenius' 'body and soul' emblem – 'anima est corporis vita una in tota', and from that of 'inserviando aliis consumer', the emblem of the toiling physician being consumed in the service of mankind.