

To Hide Is to Reveal: the Paradox of Representing Secrets

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By following the thread of specific and selected texts, I would like to show the kind of development the representation of secrets undergoes in the 16th and 17th centuries, against the background of epistemic transformations presented in the introduction of this volume, and relating to the status of knowledge and the objective of uncovering its secret.

1 Starting with a Paradox

A mystery should be kept secret: a mystery is either something that cannot be understood or something that cannot be revealed to anyone. Reasons for keeping the secret are dependent on these two facets of the mystery: in order to avoid misunderstanding and to preserve the integrity of the mystery, certain strategies (for example, discursive strategies or devices) must be imagined and implemented. But at the same time, these mysteries, precisely in order to be preserved, must be transmitted, and then represented, in one way or another. So, how does one represent something that should be kept in secrecy and/or that is not even understood, but that nonetheless should somehow be disseminated? These are the preliminary terms of the paradox of representing the secret.

Emblem 20 of Gilles Corrozet's *Hécatomgraphie* [Fig. 18.1] could very well stand as the emblem of the paradox of representing the secret as well as of the line of thought that underpins this paradox as it presents itself in the early modern period; namely, the veiling and unveiling of the secret of Nature. It encapsulates the paradoxical figurability of the secret. This emblem, entitled 'Secret est à louer', is accompanied by the following quatrain:

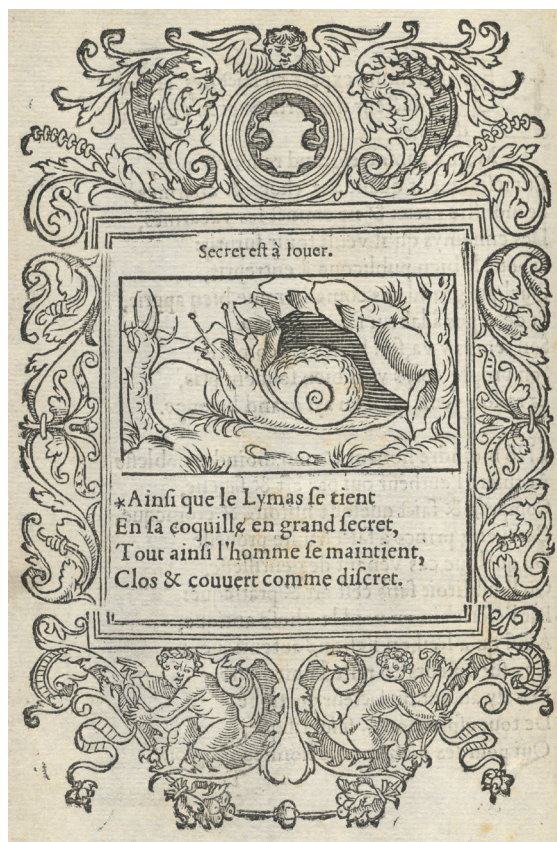


FIGURE 18.1
Corrozet Gilles,
Hecatographie (Paris, Denis
Janot: 1540), emblem 20
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Ainsi que le Lymas se tient
En sa coquille en grand secret,
Tout ainsi l'homme se maintient,
Clos et couvert comme discret.¹

Just as the snail keeps himself
In its shell, in great secrecy:
So then man is born
Closed and concealed in discretion.²

1 Corrozet Gilles, *Hecatographie, c'est-à-dire les descriptions de cent figures & hystoires, contenant plusieurs apophtegmes, proverbes, sentences & dicts tant des Anciens que des modernes* (Paris, Denis Janot: 1540). For a slightly different interpretation of this engraving, revealing another secret contained in the image, see Conley T., "A Topographer's Eye: From Gilles Corrozet to Pieter Apian", in Melion W.S. – Palmer Wandel L. (eds.), *Early Modern Eyes* (Leiden: 2010) 55–79.

2 Conley, "A Topographer's Eye" 55.

The snail represented in the engraving is indeed very shy and very secretive: not content with getting out of its shell, it also emerges very cautiously from a rocky cavity. It seems to be on the lookout for any possible danger on the horizon. The gastropod, which has emerged from its shell and is leaving its dark cave, seems to reveal the unfathomable void of its shell's interior, its secret, but a secret in the manner precisely of the unfigurable or, even, figurative only through the impossibility of the gaze penetrating it. It offers a representation in the lack of figuration, in its interstices and boundaries, its borders, and hence here, in the black-hatched area between the outside of the shell and the outside of the little cave's rocks, at the point of noncontact or of contact that is at the very least problematic, between the figure and its interior – which is exteriorised, turned inside out, and displayed. However, the game does not stop there, for if we now zoom out we can discern other forms hidden in the engraving, the emergence of another possible configuration of the image in which the snail is found at the heart, in the cavity, hidden, in the secret of its enveloping double: the rocks of the cave and the plant at the far left of the engraving form the other snail, in which the 'natural' snail is *forclus* ('shut out'), as the poem says, concealed from the first snail, a concealment revealed by the engraving – surreptitiously, unbeknownst to the animal that is looking elsewhere, a look hidden from the reader – and that indicates through this nested construction an infinite horizon of the secret, since the secret revealed is precisely another secret, an idea again suggested by the spiral convolutions of the shell, which are clearly emphasised in this relatively sober play of lines. It is a question here of the only possible figurability of the secret, but in asymptotic manner, in the naming of its absence: the secret hidden in the image is always as much a matter of image-making as of secret-making.

The representation of a secret, be it thematized or embedded in the act of representing, implements evanescent, spectral, or phantasmal devices, more or less conspicuous to the viewer and reader. It always engages with processes of figurability specifically based on the paradox of the 'secrecy effect' described by Louis Marin, an effect based on the construction of specific devices to make the secret not known but guessed at, or intuited, by the reader-viewer.

In the early modern period, one of the many *topoi* used to express this kind of device is the image of the veil. Two intertwined traditions were revived at that time, namely the Neoplatonist arguments stated by the Pseudo-Dionysius and the arguments of the mythographers. Taking their cue from both traditions, prefaces, and addresses to the readers of treatises about *ars symbolica* and *imago figurata* explain *ad infinitum* why and how it is necessary to hide, veil, and *adumbrate* the secrets of Truth. However, on close reading, one cannot help

but notice the ambivalence of such recommendations and practices, in which the veil is designated as such – as a way to hide – while becoming at the same time the index of the secret to unveil. The veil is conceived more as a fabric of indices to decipher than as a genuine covering to protect the mystical truth.

I would like to examine this paradox, its presentation and evolution, through the course of the seventeenth century in France. To do so, I will concentrate on a series of theoretical texts dealing with the *ars symbolica* and with mythography. These are the end point of a long tradition that I will also briefly present. These texts are the preface by Jean Martin to his translation of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, published in Paris in 1546; the two long preliminary texts by Béroalde de Verville to his edition of the same book, published in 1600 under the title *Le Tableau des riches inventions couvertes du voile des feintes Amoureuses, qui sont représentées dans le Songe de Poliphile Desvoilées des ombres du Songe et subtilement exposées par Beroalde*; and the *Cinq livres de Hiéroglyphiques*, by Pierre Dinet, of 1614.³ I will also use some passages from several of Claude-François Ménestrier's books. Finally, I will also draw on *Les Entretiens d'Ariste et Eugène*, by the Jesuit Dominique Bouhours, published in 1671.

The paradox is actually very simple. It consists in the fact that the implementation of a mysterious representation, of a form that is supposed to transmit or represent a mystery, contains its own revealing. If it does not, then the secret of the mystery cannot be known and remains ineffective. Somehow anticipating Louis Marin, Ménestrier explains this issue very well in his *Philosophie des images énigmatiques*, on at least two different occasions.

First, in the preface, he invokes what he calls 'the ingenious mystery', 'in order,' he says, 'to make us understand that the mind makes up mystery where there is in fact none'; he then contrasts this 'ingenious mystery' with the

3 This list of titles is a selection among many other similar books or prefaces, developing the same argumentation about the reasons for hiding and revealing truth. Among these other books, one finds the translation that Jean Baudoin made of Francis Bacon's *The Wisdom of the Ancients* (1609) under the title *La Sagesse Mystérieuse des Anciens: Ombragée du Voile des Fables, appliquées moralement aus secrets de l'Estat, & de la Nature* (1619). Indeed, what Bacon expounds in his preface is in every respect similar to the argumentation developed in the other aforementioned books. But the aim of Bacon is not so much to perpetuate this tradition than to pave the way of a new epistemology. Studying Bacon's thought largely exceeds the scope of this article, even though he certainly represents a reference point in the evolution I am sketching here.

religious (that is, Christian) mystery, which 'does not depend on the mind but is in the nature of the thing itself'.⁴

But later on in the book, Ménéstrier is more ambivalent:

[S]i je vois un Tableau de Moïse exposé sur les eaux, de Job couché sur un fumier, d'une Vierge qui tient l'Enfant Jesus, de la Transfiguration, [...] comment puis-je connoître que c'est une Enigme, n'y aiant rien d'énigmatique [...]?

[I]f I see a painting of Moses in his basket on the river, of Job lying on a dunghill, of a Virgin holding the child Jesus, of the Transfiguration [...], how can I recognise that it is an enigma, since there is nothing of the enigmatic in it [...]?⁵

If one follows the logic of this line of argument, one is led to understand that these representations, as Christian as they are, also need some kind of ingenuity that will be the index of their mysterious feature, the clue that there is a secret to uncover. So it seems that whatever the topic, the representation of mystery is always something built in order *to produce a secrecy effect*.

In the chapter 'Logique du secret' of his book *Lectures traversières*, Louis Marin comes up with the idea of the 'secrecy effect'. He explains that the secrecy effect is a kind of game played by three people (A, B, and C). It's a game of the 'included-excluded middle', and it proceeds like this:

A sait quelque chose de B que celui-ci ignore [...]. Pour que le jeu du secret s'engage, il faut qu'en quelque façon A transmette cette histoire à un tiers [...] qui n'a pas le même intérêt que B à savoir [...]. La partie alors commence: A partage sa connaissance de B avec C, un savoir que B devrait posséder, qu'il voudrait même acquérir parce qu'il y va de son intérêt et dont il reste pour le moment à l'écart. [...] C'est donc au moment où A partage avec C ce que B devrait savoir et qui l'assigne comme son destinataire propre que l'effet de secret commence à opérer.⁶

4 'pour faire entendre, dit-il, que c'est l'esprit qui fait du mystère où il n'y en a pas, au lieu que l'autre [le mystère de la religion] ne dépend pas de l'esprit, mais se tient du côté de la nature même de la chose', Ménéstrier Claude-François, *La Philosophie des images énigmatiques* (Lyon, Hilaire Battitel: 1694) n.p.

5 Ménéstrier Claude-François, *La Philosophie des images énigmatiques* (Lyon, Hilaire Baritel: 1694) 160.

6 Marin L., *Lectures traversières* (Paris: 1992) 253.

A knows something about B that B is unaware of [...]. In order for the secrecy game to begin it is necessary that in some way A tells this story to a third party [...] who does not have the same interest as B in knowing it [...]. Then the game starts: A shares his knowledge of B with C, a knowledge that B ought to have, that he would even like to acquire since it is in his interests but that for the time being remains distant from him [...]. It is therefore at the point when A shares with C what B ought to know and assigns this knowledge to B as its appropriate recipient that the secrecy effect begins to work.

This paradox of the secret as being there to be revealed, as existing only at the very moment when it is shared, at the moment when it includes someone while also excluding someone else, fits exactly with what we find in our early modern texts when they describe why there is a mystery to be kept secret and how it is hidden, that is, how it is fabricated.

2 Pseudo-Dionysius and Mythographical Traditions

As already mentioned, two intertwined traditions developed these arguments: one stemming from Pseudo-Dionysius and one belonging to mythographical writings, both of which pertain to and prompt allegorical and exegetical issues. Pseudo-Dionysius was one of the main theological authorities in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in the foreground once again thanks to new translations and editions of his works, and thanks to the Neoplatonic trend that emerged at the end of the fifteenth century in Italy and France. As far as mythographical works are concerned, the Renaissance was certainly the most productive time in mythographical readings and new writing.⁷ New compilations were published in the years 1550–1560, among which the most widely disseminated and reprinted were those by Giraldi, Cartari, and Conti. Their common feature is to claim a double function for their work: a function of preservation (of ancient myths) and of interpretation. This latter function, as we will see, is in line with the Dionysian arguments. At any rate, both traditions assign to fables and fictions the function of veiling Truth, and notably divine

⁷ Zucker A. – Fabre-Serris J. – Tilliette J.-Y. – Besson G. (eds.), *Lire les mythes: formes, usages et visées des pratiques mythographiques de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq: 2016) 21.

Truth; they assign to fables and fictions the status of figures, rhetorical and poetical figures with either a religious or a philosophical reference.

The main reason adduced by Pseudo-Dionysius for hiding divine Truth and for literally *making mysteries* is the need to protect Truth from being sullied by the profane, by people who are not initiated and not worthy of or ready to receive and understand it. He explains this at length at the beginning of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*:

The first leaders of our hierarchy received their fill of the sacred gift from the transcendent Deity. Then divine goodness sent them to lead others to this same gift. Like gods, they had a burning and generous urge to secure uplifting and divinization for their subordinates. And so, using images derived from the sense they spoke of the transcendent. [...] As they had been commanded to they did this for us, not simply because of the profane from whom the symbols were to be kept out of reach, but because, as I have already stated, our own hierarchy is itself symbolical and adapted to what we are. In a divine fashion it needs perceptible things to lift up into the domain of conceptions.

Now the reasons for such symbolism were revealed to the divine sacred-initiators, and it would have been wrong of them to explain them fully to those still on the road to initiation.⁸

These arguments developed by Pseudo-Dionysius belong to a very long tradition, going back at least to Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Republic*, in which Socrates explains on several occasions why and how to use myths for educating youth, for transmitting philosophical teachings, and also for shaping social morality.⁹

Thus this discourse is applied to Truth contained in ancient myths by humanists, mythographers, and also by poets, who indeed become in a way mythographers, especially when it comes to justifying and explaining Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. This is the case, for example, in the *Bible des poètes* published by Vêrard in 1493, or in the preface to the *Grand Olympe* of 1532, and later in several of Barthélémy Aneau's writings in the second half of the sixteenth century. By that time, reflection on the use of allegorical and symbolical devices

8 Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York, NY – Mahwah, NJ: 1987) 199.

9 See Hadot, *Le Voile d'Isis*, and Lecompte S., *La Chaîne d'or des poètes: Présence de Macrobe dans l'Europe humaniste* (Genève: 2009).

to convey hidden knowledge had greatly benefited from the development of emblematic literature and had focused attention on the use and significance of hieroglyphs as the secretive signs or objects *par excellence*.

This is plainly explained by Claude Mignault in his preface to the edition of Alciato's emblems in 1571:

The Egyptians were the first to use these symbols which they called Hieroglyphs, and with which *they sought to insure that their remarkable and truly obscure knowledge was understood only by themselves*. Because they deliberately and wisely alienated the common people from this knowledge by way of these ingenious and clever symbols, as I already said, by these means, they wanted the secrets of their most difficult and important teaching to be heard only by chaste and honest ears, and well-prepared minds. [...] *For this reason, it is obvious, the sacred oracles were formerly given through enigmas*, and the true mysteries were not revealed to those who approached them brutally or imprudently, but to those who had first been purified and who had carefully prepared themselves. [...] All those who have written in ancient times about something divine, both Barbarians and Greeks, wanted the fundamental principles of these [divine] things to remain hidden and *confided Truth itself to enigmas, signs, symbols and other allegorical figures* [...].¹⁰

The hieroglyph is thus presented as being at the origin of all symbolical forms, but more precisely as the element that gives these forms and these representations their mysterious quality, the one that indicates there is a secret to be penetrated, especially the secret of origins. This veil is therefore a double-edged protection that appears as a rhetorical device to arouse curiosity and to kindle the desire to unveil. Indeed, the idea of arousing curiosity and giving the reader the opportunity to have the pleasure of understanding what was at first sight obscure comes up very soon in the topical discourse about veiling and unveiling. It was to take on different roles that correspond to the traditional scope of rhetoric: to instruct, to aid memorization, and to move.

¹⁰ Alciat Andrea, *Omnia Andreae Alciati Emblemata, cum commentariis ... per Claudium Minoem, Syntagma de Symbolis* (Anvers, Plantin: 1577) 31 (my italics).

3 The Secret as a Representation

Thus a similar argument to the one developed by Mignault can be found in an earlier example, the preface of Jean Martin, the French translator of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* in 1546, except that he introduces a new element that changes it significantly: these 'good things' are hidden in order to give the reader the pleasure of discovering them:

Vous pouvez croire Messesseurs que dessoubz ceste fiction il y a beaucoup de bonnes choses cachees, qu'il n'est licite de reveler, et aussi n'auriez vous point de plaisir si l'on vous les specifoit particulièrement: car jamais ne gouteriez la saveur du fruit qui se peust cueillir [*sic*] en ceste lecture: parquoy ne vous en diray autre chose, ains remettray le tout a l'exercice de voz estudes.¹¹

You may believe, Gentlemen, that beneath this fiction there are many good things hidden, which it is not permitted to reveal, and also you would have no pleasure in it if they were specifically pointed out: for never would you taste the flavour of the fruit that may be picked in this reading: and so I will tell you no more of it, but rather put everything back to the practice of your studies.

This statement, placed at the opening of the book, establishes a pact with the reader, who is encouraged to embark on a quest for signs, to literally investigate the text and the images. It also designates or identifies explicitly and somewhat tautologically the representation as a built mystery and the mystery itself as an artefact, hence as a representation. The text offers at the same time its enigma (that is, its symbolic encoding) and its secret (the solution to the enigma). This key feature was to gradually take on more prominence, until it became the only *raison d'être* of mysterious representations.

The hiding processes or tricks are indices, not so much of a hidden truth or of a higher and divine truth, but rather indices to decipher, to interpret, and then to help memorization and instruct the reader: this is the idea that underpins the French translation and edition of Natale Conti's *Mythologiae* published by Jean Baudoin in 1627 in Paris. For Baudoin, the *fabula* is a demonstration, and therefore it is a device that shows things rather than a device that hides or veils. As Céline Bohnert has shown, it differs from the idea that Conti himself

11 Jean Martin, preface to *Hypnerotomachie ou Discours du Songe de Poliphile*, by [Colonna Francesco] (Paris, Jacques Kerver: 1546) n.p.

had about the nature and functions of the *fabula*.¹² As an heir of the early humanists (and in accordance with the other main Italian mythographers such as Cartari and Giraldi, and Boccaccio before them), Conti conceived of the *fabula* as a philosophy that embraces a universal knowledge about the Creation. It therefore follows that reading of the fables and study of the myths give access to a universal, atemporal, and divine knowledge and lead to the contemplation of divine mysteries. It thus requires some kind of initiation so that the reader-exegete becomes able to participate in this revelation. The difference of conception between Baudoin and Conti is striking and anticipates by nearly fifty years a development that I had previously thought took place much later, namely, the rhetoricisation of symbolical thought, even though many forerunners can be found from the beginning of the seventeenth century onwards.

The very long preface that Béroalde de Verville wrote to his edition of the *Poliphile* in 1600, and in which he invents a new framing fiction for Colonna's story together with an alchemical interpretation of the book, extensively exploits the Dionysian and mythographical arguments through the paradigm of the veil:

[C]et Auteur [Colonna] suit la façon des Anciens, qui voiloient toute sorte de verité philosophique de certaines figures agreables qui attiroient les cœurs. [...] Proprement son ouvrage Italien n'est qu'une peinture nûe à ceux qui n'ont point esté nourris és lieux ou s'acquiert la science, si qu'Italien il escrivoit aux Italiens, mais pour n'estre receu que des plus delicats en intelligence.¹³

This Author [Colonna] follows the manner of the Ancients, who veiled every kind of philosophical truth with certain pleasing figures that attracted the heart. [...] His Italian work is really nothing other than a naked painting to those who have not been brought up in places where knowledge is acquired, and as an Italian he wrote for Italians, but to be understood only by the most refined in intelligence.

12 Bohnert C., "Mythologiae / Mythologie: mythologie et allégorie selon Natale Conti et Jean Baudoin", in Pioffet M.-C. – Spica A.-É. (eds.), *S'exprimer autrement: Théorie et enjeux de l'allégorie à l'époque classique* (Tübingen: 2016) 111–124.

13 [Colonna, Francesco], preface to *Le Tableau des riches inventions couvertes du voile des feintes Amoureuses, qui sont représentées dans le Songe de Poliphile Desvoilées des ombres du Songe et subtilement exposées par Beroalde [de Verville]* (Paris, Mathieu Guillemot: 1600) n.p.

If fictions contained in the book were imagined on purpose in order to protect Truth from the common people, these pleasant figures should nonetheless function also as a lure in order to stimulate the will ('attiraient les cœurs') and the desire to acquire this knowledge, to discover what is under the cover, and which was designated as being hidden under what he calls somewhere else 'simulacres ineptes' ('inept simulacra'), 'frivoles nuées' ('frivolous clouds'), and 'imaginationes': 'toutesfois il ne laisse de jeter infinis appasts aux cœurs philosophes, pour les espoigner à lever les voiles, et considerer ce qui est dessous' ('Nevertheless, he does not cease to cast infinite lures to philosophical hearts so as to prick them to lift the veils, and to consider what is beneath').¹⁴ So what gives their value to these imaginary and apparently vain creations is their ability to 'espoigner', literally to 'prick' the desire of knowledge in the reader, and more generally in the happy few who participate in the quest. But the argument again swallows its own tail since, in fact, only those who already know can elucidate the mystery of the representation, which was in any event put in place on purpose. For Béroalde, it all depends on the deciphering sight, which he strikingly expressed in the following sentence: 'Nous allons toujours en avant, devorans avec les yeux gloutons tout ce qui avoit apparence de beauté ou similitude, cachant les secrets [...]' ('We always went forwards, eating up with greedy eyes everything which had the appearance of beauty or similitude, hiding secrets [...]').¹⁵ And the nymph Oloclirée does not say anything different when she finally exhorts them: 'Sçachez, voyez, et entendez, et vous remarquerez prudemment que les plus specieux, magnifiques et bons mysteres, ont esté cachez et retracez soubz les beautez d'amour' ('Know, see, and hear, and you will wisely notice that the most illusory, magnificent, and fine mysteries have been hidden and delineated beneath the beauties of love').¹⁶

However, in spite of this pleasing feature, the main objective of such a strategy remains knowledge, as the narrator of the preface clearly affirms: 'Son intention est de faire paroistre que soubz le sombre des mysteres differens ou chacun s'arreste selon l'intherest [*sic*] de son cœur, on cherche la science' ('Its intention is to show that beneath the darkness of the different mysteries where each stops according to the interests of his heart, we seek knowledge').¹⁷

A notable change was to occur over the course of the seventeenth century to end in an inversion of the priorities between pleasure and knowledge. Still, in 1614, in the preface to his *Cinq livres hiéroglyphiques*, Pierre Dinet explains

¹⁴ *Ibidem.*

¹⁵ *Ibidem.*

¹⁶ *Ibidem.*

¹⁷ *Ibidem.*

that there are two different kinds of writing, the ordinary way to write and the secret one:

[L]'occulte secrette [écriture], qu'on déguise d'infinies sortes, chacun selon sa fantaisie, pour ne la rendre intelligible qu'entre soy, et ses consçachans, inventee au surplus jadis les premiers, et plus heureux siecles, souz l'ombre et nuage des plantes, animaux, et autres telles choses, par les Prestres et Sages des Hebrieux, Chaldees, Egyptiens, Ethiopiens, Indiens, pour voiler les sacrez secrets de leur Theologie et Philosophie: afin de les garantir et soustraire du prophanement de la multitude, et en laisser la cognoissance aux gens dignes.¹⁸

The occult secret [writing], which is disguised in an infinity of ways, according to each one's imagination, so as to make it intelligible only to themselves, and to their fellow savants, and furthermore invented long ago in early and happier centuries, beneath the shade and cloud of plants, animals, and other similar things, by the Priests and Sages of the Hebrews, Chaldeans, Egyptians, Ethiopians, Indians, in order to veil the sacred secrets of their Theology and Philosophy: so as to safeguard them and remove them from the profanity of the multitude, and to leave their knowledge to worthy people.

However, in his 1662 *Art des emblèmes*, Ménestrier praised the charms of the veil in a slightly different way, while summing up the tradition that I have just presented:

La Vérité mesme que les anciens ont représentée toute nue a *de si doux charmes sous ces voiles, qu'elle instruit en divertissant [...]* et depuis les Egyptiens qui commencèrent les premiers à couvrir leurs mystères sous des hiéroglyphes, toutes les autres nations ont fait gloire de les imiter. C'est de cet art merveilleux que sont sortis les Emblèmes, les devises, les enigmes, les chiffres, les blasons, et les empreintes des médailles et des monnaies, qui font partie des belles-lettres.¹⁹

The Truth itself that the Ancients represented quite nakedly has *such sweet charms beneath these veils, that it teaches while it entertains [...]* and

18 Dinet Pierre, *Cinq livres de Hiéroglyphiques, où sont contenus les plus rares secrets de la Nature, et propriété de toutes choses* (Paris, J. de Heuqueville: 1614) n.p.

19 Ménestrier Claude-François, *L'Art des emblèmes* (Lyon, Benoist Coral: 1662) 4 (my italics).

since the Egyptians who were the first to begin to conceal their mysteries beneath hieroglyphs, all other nations have gloried in imitating them. From this marvellous art have issued Emblems, imprese, enigmas, figures, coats of arms, and the imprints of medals and coins, which are a part of belles lettres.

The widespread early modern instruction of 'teaching while entertaining' is applied to the veiling/unveiling process; it organizes a general aesthetic of surprise that seems to have become the dominant paradigm around the time Ménestrier was active, in the second half of the century, even though it had been well prepared from the beginning of the century. This surprise, supported by a strong sense of wonder, brings about pleasure and satisfaction – first the pleasure of acquiring knowledge and elucidating the mysteries of divine Truth or Wisdom, and then the pleasure of deciphering ingenious artefacts, reserved for certain 'savants délicats que le Collège n'a point gâtés, et que le monde a polis' ('fine savants whom college has not spoiled and the world has polished'), according to the Jesuit Dominique Bouhours in his 1671 *Entretiens d'Ariste et Eugène*. It is also in these *Entretiens* that Bouhours fully articulates the notion of 'je-ne-sais-quoi', which is certainly the final point of transformation of the veiling/unveiling process. It is very clear for Bouhours that the 'je-ne-sais-quoi' is but a curious or ingenious artifice for the mystery of things, of everything and anything:

[...] il est du je ne sçay quoy comme de ces beautez couvertes d'un voile, qui sont d'autant plus estimées, qu'elles sont moins exposées à la veuë; et ausquelles l'imagination ajoute toûjours quelque chose. De sorte que si par hazard on venoit à appercevoir ce je ne sçay quoy qui surprend, et qui emporte le cœur à une première veuë, on ne seroit peut-estre pas si touché, ni si enchanté qu'on est: mais on ne l'a point encore découvert, and on ne le découvrira jamais apparemment: puisque si l'on pouvoit le découvrir, il cesseroit d'estre ce qu'il est, comme je vous l'ay déjà dit.²⁰

[...] there is a je ne sais quoi of these beauties as if covered by a veil, which are all the more esteemed the less they are revealed to the sight: and to which the imagination always adds something. So that if by chance we were to understand this je ne sais quoi, which surprises and carries away the heart on first sight, we would perhaps not be so moved or enchanted

20 Bouhours Dominique, *Les Entretiens d'Ariste et d'Eugène* (Paris, Sébastien Mabre-Cramoisy: 1671) 254–255.

as we are: but we have not discovered it yet, and it seems we never will discover it: for if we were able to discover it, it would cease to be what it is, as I have already said.

It seems that with Bouhours, the sense of wonder is reduced to a playful gesture to unveil, in place of the learned and wise quest for wonderful mysteries. It seems to boil down to an artful pleasure in unveiling, much like a mundane game, rather than discovering some hidden knowledge of the kind so strongly coveted by Béroalde.²¹

To conclude, I would like to dwell a moment on the translation that Jean Baudoin gave in 1619 of Bacon's *De sapientia veterum* (1609), under the slightly unfaithful title *La Sagesse mystérieuse des Anciens* (*The Mysterious Wisdom of the Ancients*). Even though he does not mention it, Bacon drew a lot on Natale Conti's *Mythologia*,²² which Baudoin had translated into French in 1627. As already mentioned, Baudoin's understanding of mythography was markedly different from that of Conti. What he did with Conti's book, so he did with Bacon's: not only did he translate it in 1619, but he also profusely and very explicitly drew from it to compile his *Recueil d'emblèmes divers*, published in two volumes in 1638 and 1639, respectively, alongside Alciat, Jacob Bruck, Covarrubias, and others. As he wrote, he considered Bacon's work as an emblem book – one of the most learned emblem books of his time. If it is difficult to define Bacon's *De sapientia veterum* as an emblem book, it is likewise difficult to take it just as an adaptation of Conti's compilation, as Baudoin would have first made us thought in his translation and as some later critics would reinforce. To be sure, the underlying common thread of these three books, borrowing content from one another and, chronologically, one after the other, is the idea that ancient wisdom had been hidden under the veil of pagan fables and symbols (or emblems, which are equated in Baudoin's). Pagan fables, symbols, and emblems are all representations of secrets. However, all three books invoke this principle for different reasons, and this is what is of interest to us. Conti's mythography is more or less in alignment with the allegorical Neoplatonist understanding of mythology, which should yield true spiritual wisdom to the worthy exegete. From this basis, Bacon and Baudoin drew two distinct lines. Baudoin was quick to integrate mythography in the rhetorical arsenal of witty ornaments,

21 Even in book III of his *Entretiens*, entirely devoted to the notion of the secret, Bouhours seems to ignore the esoteric and hermetic traditions of his predecessors, dealing only with secrets in friendship and politics.

22 Bacon Francis, *La sagesse des Anciens*, ed. J.-P. Cavaillé (Paris: 1997) 14, 20; Carman Gardner B., "Francis Bacon, Natalis Comes and the Mythological Tradition", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 33 (1970) 264–290.

following the massive trend of rhetoricisation of emblematic and symbolic literature that took place throughout the seventeenth century. As far as Bacon is concerned, ancient fables have, unsurprisingly, two opposite functions: to cover and to illustrate or to encrypt and to transmit [knowledge] (*adumbrare* in Latin, like ‘adumbrate’ in English, with their double ambivalent meaning). The English philosopher does not expand much on the first function. Rather, he focuses on the second function, which interests him most because he sees it as an innovative way of transmitting and also *demonstrating* new knowledge.²³ Paradoxically, his argumentation for this epistemological innovation is based on the traditional and humanist linguistic ideal of accessing the true nature of things through the use of parabolic poetry and symbolic images. This ‘enigmatic method’ using ‘figures’ is thus a *ratio docendi*, which appropriates the language of the first philosophers who were able to express themselves only through this fabulist language because they lacked argumentative tools and examples. The subsequent tradition (mythographers but also Greek philosophers) made a secret (or secrets) out of these fables. Thus, taking very different paths, Baudoin and Bacon manage to demystify the ‘secrecy effect’ of the allegorical narratives they are interpreting, turning them respectively into rhetorical ornaments and heuristic tools for new knowledge.

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23 Bacon, *La sagesse des Anciens* 42.

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