Angles

New Perspectives on the Anglophone World

11 | 2020

Are You Game?

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/angles/2956>

DOI: 10.4000/angles.2956

ISSN: 2274-2042

Publisher

Société des Anglicistes de l'Enseignement Supérieur

Electronic reference

Pierre Le Duff, "'Ev'ry Gamester winneth by the sport': George Wither's Emblem Lottery (1635)", *Angles* [Online], 11 | 2020, Online since 01 November 2020, connection on 06 June 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/angles/2956> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/angles.2956>

This text was automatically generated on 6 June 2022.

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‘Ev’ry Gamester winneth by the sport’: George Wither’s Emblem Lottery (1635)

Pierre Le Duff

“I confesse that this Devise may probably be censured, as unsutable to the gravitie expected in my ripe yeares : and be reputed as great an Indecorum, as erecting an Ale-house at the Church-stile” (Wither A1v)

- ¹ The “Devise” mentioned in this rather striking simile is the lottery game that George Wither invented for his *Collection of Emblemes* (1635). Emblem books, which were a popular literary genre throughout Renaissance Europe, are collections of intermedial compositions usually encompassing an allegorical engraving and varying amounts of text that convey meaning through the combined reading of both semiotic codes¹. Emblems were usually intended as didactic material, as they often invite the beholder to ponder moral or religious advice exemplified in the engraving and expounded in the accompanying verse, but, as Manning and others have shown, as the 17th century unfolded, they were increasingly used to serve distinctly political aims as well, most notably during the English Civil War (Potter 1989: 48 qtd. in Browning 2002: 70), and were also progressively understood as playful devices (see Manning 2002: 220-74).
- ² This is particularly clear in the case of Wither’s *Collection*: each one of his two hundred emblems, which are divided into four books of fifty, is accompanied by a short stanza, or “lottery”, to be found in a section appended to the volume. The last page of the work shows an engraving of two square-shaped dials (Figure 1), each of which was intended to be equipped with a wooden pointer in the middle.² The player would spin the first pointer to be directed towards an emblem — or one of six blank lots —, and then the second, which would indicate the volume in which the emblem was to be sought. Although Wither did not feel the need to specify in what order the lottery verse and the emblem were to be read, the phrasing of the former often implies that the reader ought

to start there.³ It is possible to play the game on one's own of course, but Wither suggests that it "may aswell become / The Hall, the Parlor, or the Dining-roome" (A3r), and bases most of his statements about his lottery on the assumption that his readers will play the game collectively, each person in attendance spinning the pointers and then reading their lottery verse and the corresponding emblem aloud for all to hear (Wither [1635] 1975: A3r).

Figure : Wither's lottery dials. *A Collection of Emblemes, Ancient and Moderne...* Printed by A[ugustine] M[athewes] for Robert Milbourne, and are to be sold at the Grayhound in Pauls Church-yard, MDCXXXV), last folio (v)

Source: The British Library; STC 1161:13.

- 3 In the title of the volume, the lottery is mentioned and even advertised as an addition to the volume "[t]hat Instruction, and Good Counsell, may bee furthered by an Honest and Pleasant Recreation" (Title page), and in the first section of the epistle "To the Reader", it is described as a game devised "to allure men to the more serious observation of the profitable Morals, couched in these Emblems" (A1r). As such, it would appear to be in line with the Horatian precept of "*utile dulci*" (Horace l. 343), which was frequently used during the early modern period to defend and justify the writing of poetry (Matz 2004: 1-3), and to constitute one more instance in a long tradition of books containing interactive and playful devices (Karr Schmidt 2018). The *Veridicus Christianus* (1601), an emblem book by the Dutch Jesuit Jan David, even sets a precedent within the same genre, as it contains a very similar contraption — David calls it "*Orbita probitatis*" (David 351 ff.), which loosely translates to "wheel of probity" — that directs the reader toward a specific emblem by means of a *volvelle*.⁴ As Wither points out himself in the section titled "The Occasion, Intention, and use of the foure lotteries adjoynd to these foure books of emblems", the game also serves a far more pragmatic purpose, that of ensuring the commercial success of a volume that would

otherwise be among “over-solid and serious treatises [that] would undoe the Book-sellers” for lack of enthusiasm from a readership that “is so in love with Follie” (A1v). It is to “please the vulgar Capacities” that Wither begrudgingly — or so he claims⁵ — condescended to append the lottery game to his emblems.

- 4 Given his honourable didactic purpose, his reliance on a well-established tradition, and the sound mercantile strategy he lays out, it may seem surprising that Wither anticipates censure for his lottery. And yet, he pre-emptively names, or suggests, several reasons why some of his readers may take exception to it. Aside from being deemed possibly “unsutable to the gravitie expected in [his] ripe yeares” (A1v) — Wither was in his late forties when the work was published — and “indecorous” — as was mentioned above, the game could also be mistaken for an actual divinatory device, or so the poet supposes: “For, my meaning is not, that any should use it as an Oracle, which could signifie infallibly, what is divinely allotted” (A2v), a notion he immediately, and strongly, repudiates: “And, that I may no way encourage the secret entertaining of such a Fantasie, I doe before hand affirme unto them, that none but Children, or Ideots may be tollerated to be so foolish, without laughing at” (A2v). Wither’s main concern however, deeply rooted in his own experience with the reception of previous works,⁶ is that some of his readers may take his lottery verses and the corresponding emblems to be veiled personal attacks:

Some will thinke perhaps, that I have purposely invented this Game, that I might finde means to reprove mens vices, without being suspected, (as I have hitherto unjustly beene) to ayme at particular persons (A3r).

- 5 And yet, Wither’s other comments on the game, as well as the lottery verses themselves, are, at times, so strikingly dissonant with these careful pre-emptive caveats that, on the whole, his stance concerning his playful device can only be described as ambivalent (Bath 1994: 126). Although the two paratextual sections that discuss the lottery strongly emphasise the playful, innocent, and even incidental nature of the game,⁷ its importance in the general economy of the work becomes apparent upon closer examination. As I shall try to show, the lottery constitutes an ingenious and interactive way to reflect on serious religious and philosophical questions, such as the dichotomy between free will and predestination, or the trustworthiness of predictions through the process of bibliomancy, both of which were the matter of lively discussion, and sometimes fierce hostility, in early Stuart England. Furthermore, the element of play that is inherent to the lottery, especially if, in accordance with Wither’s instructions, it is used as a parlour game, is employed by Wither to momentarily, and playfully, arrogate control over the fate of prospective players of all ranks and classes, so as to shift social hierarchies and power structures in his favour.

The Lottery Game and the Porous Border between Prophecy and Agency

- 6 As was noted by several scholars (e.g. Bath 1994: 126; Ripollés 2008: 118-9), the lottery game is (meta-)emblematically represented in the centre of the frontispiece to *A Collection of Emblemes* (Figure 2), a fact that jars with the claim that the device is merely a late, and dispensable, addition to the book. The frontispiece is an intricate engraving by a famous English artist, William Marshall, which Carmen Ripollés describes as follows:

The image depicts a group of pilgrims which, emerging from a grotto located at the lower part of the composition, pass by the presence of the two allegorical figures, Virtue and Fortune. Perhaps encouraged by the presence of the Church and the seven virtues, some pilgrims decide to follow the path of Virtue, difficult and rocky in the beginning, yet gradually becoming more open and bearable as it leads to an ideal city. Other pilgrims, seduced by the sight of the temple of Venus and the seven vices, follow the path of Fortune, enjoying a pleasurable walk that progressively becomes difficult and deadly, concluding with death in hell. (Ripollés 2008: 119)

- 7 Crucially, when the pilgrims reach the two allegories mentioned above, they are required to draw lots from a large ewer. The frontispiece can be read as a *mise-en-abyme*, where the path walked by the pilgrims from the grotto towards the twin peaks at the back would echo the figurative journey from ignorance to moral edification undertaken by the reader, on which the lottery game — represented by the ewer in the picture — would constitute a significant milestone (Le Duff 2020: 6-7). Despite Wither's remarks in his "Preposition to this Frontispiece"⁸ and in his aforementioned paratextual notes, it seems that the lottery is in fact as central to the book as the ewer, its emblematic *pendant*, is to the frontispiece.

Figure :The frontispiece. *A Collection of Emblemes, Ancient and Moderne...* Printed by A[ugustine] M[athewes] for Robert Milbourne, and are to be sold at the Grayhound in Pauls Church-yard, MDCXXXV), first folio (v)

Source: The British Library; STC 1161:13.

- 8 *A Collection of Emblemes*, though it is first and foremost an emblem book, can therefore be examined in light of a long-established, if minor, literary genre that one might term “bibliomancy books”, that is, literary works that are designed as divinatory tools, in which the reader would be directed towards a passage either by simply opening the book at random or by using a device such as a *volvelle* or a pointer, and would then endeavour to interpret the passage thus selected as an oracle. This process was used,

among others, by the Greeks and the Romans (especially, in the latter case, the *sortes Vergilianae*, where oracles were derived from the texts of Virgil), and gained considerable popularity in Europe during the early modern period. Although early instances of this practice used literary works that were not specifically composed with it in mind — bibliomancy was often practiced using religious texts or poetry —, the 15th and 16th centuries saw a consistent output of so-called “lottery books” (or *Losbücher*) that were written and advertised as such (Kelly 2011: 42-71).

As defined by the literary historian Johannes Bolte, a lottery book is “a collection of prose or metrical oracles, one of which may be obtained by the curious inquirer in a manner that is not dependent on his own calculations, but rather on the mysterious exercise of an instrument subjected to and set in motion by chance.” [Bolte 1903] Serving as a mediator between the questioner and the array of possible oracles within the book’s pages, this instrument can take a number of different shapes. Most often, it is a device that has strong connections to themes of fortune and games of chance, connections which both augment and insist on the aleatory element of the process. Given the genre’s strong tendency to eschew specialized knowledge and calculations, anyone could make use of the lottery book for their own divinatory ends. The volume is presented as the locus of interpretation. If the inquirer casts the lot, the book transforms the action of sortilege (as the casting of lots is often called) into a meaningful statement for the reader’s reception. (Kelly 2011: 44)

- 9 Kelly adds that, after the casting of dice, the use of a lottery wheel was the most popular way of drawing lots in lottery books (45). It is noteworthy that, if one replaces the term “oracles” in Bolte’s definition with the term “emblems”, it would fit perfectly with Wither’s work. The resemblance becomes even more striking when one reads that “[t]he sixteenth-century lottery book was not just a textual affair, it was also heavily illustrated. For Rabelais, the lottery book is distinguished not only as a printed object, but as a particularly visual one.” (43) Kelly’s reference to Rabelais’ satirical inclusion of bibliomancy in his *Pantagruel* (1546)⁹ points to another fact when dealing with books of this kind: the degree to which their authors took their divinatory powers seriously varied greatly, from earnest prophetic intent to deliberate ambiguity and playfulness (56-7, 67-71).
- 10 Wither’s stance towards the divinatory power of his lottery certainly bears witness to both. His stern and adamant castigation of anyone who would be so foolish as to believe that the game actually possessed divinatory powers stands in clear contrast with numerous lottery verses that suggest, and in some cases even assert outright, that lots are in fact assigned not by random chance, but mysteriously find those among the players for whom the corresponding emblems are most fitting. Lottery stanza I-12, for instance, addresses the player as follows:

Be not angry, if I tell
That, you love the World too well ;
For, this Lot, perhaps, you drew,
That, such Faults, you might eschew.

- 11 In several cases, the verse suggests that the player’s drawing of a particular lot betrays their secret vice or shortcoming. Lottery II-7 warns the reader in the following terms:

Be carefull, what you goe about ;
For, by this Lot, there may be doubt,
That you, some wickednesse intend,
Which will undoe you, in the end.

- 12 Similarly, lottery III-27 admonishes the reader as follows: "There may be some concealed Cause, / That, none but you, this Emblem drawes"; and lottery IV-34, which directs towards an emblem that advises moderation in all things, rhetorically asks "If, truly temperate, thou be, / Why should this Lot, be drawne by thee?" Some are even explicitly prophetic, as is the case of lottery stanza I-16, which tells the reader that the corresponding emblem "prognosticates" that they will thrive in spite of being afflicted; lottery I-28 explicitly states that the emblem "prophesies"; and lottery II-19 reassures the reader that "as [their] Emblem doth foreshew, / A good conclusion will insue" if they remain constant in their hopes.
- 13 Crucially however, even among the lottery verses, the poet's stance on the divinatory power of his game remains highly ambiguous. As noted earlier, the epistle "To the Reader" expresses scorn and disdain in no uncertain terms for believers in divination, and the same is true for several lottery stanzas. Lottery I-41, for instance, reads "Whether, meerely, Chance, or no, / Brought this Lot, we doe not know"; lottery II-7 urges the reader to "rue" the advice contained in the emblem, even though "in jest, this Counsell came". Some stanzas even echo Wither's derogatory remarks about those who would trust the oraculous powers of the game contained in the paratext. Perhaps the most straightforward instance of this is lottery II-51 which mockingly chastises the player as follows:

Of Planetary-Calculations,
Of Superstitious-Observations,
Of Lots, and Dreames, and Accidents,
Which have but casuall events,
Thou art so fond; and, unto such,
Thou dost adhere, and trust so much,
That, it succeedeth very well,
No Emblem, now, to thee befell:
Lest, these, which onely Counsells bee,
Might seeme firme Destinies to thee.

- 14 Despite its rejection of several types of "Superstitious-Observations", among which it notably names "Lots", Wither's persona nonetheless implies that the player was mysteriously guided towards this particular stanza because of his or her innermost beliefs about the supernatural powers of devices such as lotteries, suggesting that this "Accident" may in fact not be so "casuall" at all. This apparently irreconcilable inconsistency places the stanza squarely within the realm of play, where, as Johan Huizinga puts it, "it is [...] a stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own" (1980: 8). In this "temporary sphere", it does not matter whether the player who draws this lot actually *has* blind faith in divination and astrology: the verses instead *fashion* a role for the willing player to take on, and, in the case of a collective use of the lottery, for the other players to acknowledge as part of the game, a role that will serve its recreational purpose best, if, as Wither puts it, the recipient of the lot may be "laughed at without [...] blame" (A3r). Although the laws of probability will, at times ensure that players who "are notoriously Guiltie [...] [will be] so fitted with Lots [...] that [their] vices be thereby intimated to the by-standers, of which the world knowes them guilty" (A3r), this is not necessary for the game to work. Just as Wither addresses the players through an elaborate poetic persona (Tung 2010), the players themselves are invited to participate in what the poet calls a "Puppet-play in Pictures" (A1v) in which the roles are assigned by chance, but where the maximisation of one's enjoyment relies on a willing suspension of disbelief in a

supernatural mechanism that would deliberately deliver the most appropriate lot to each person.

- 15 At the same time, the lottery game arguably maintains a residual, supernatural eeriness at a time when divination was still a widespread, if fading and increasingly contested, activity in England and early modern Europe (Capp 1979).¹⁰ Bath even points out that Wither himself was "himself regarded as something of a Magus, whose books were regarded as having mysteriously foretold future events" during and after the commonwealth period (Bath 1994: 125). To an audience that was likely to include firm believers in divination, the combination of relatively broad and transferable advice contained in the emblems with the extremely personal and apostrophising lottery verses may well have created the impression that fitting lots were mysteriously assigned to those best suited to receive them after all. The ambiguity Wither cultivated throughout the work may therefore bear witness to his own ambivalence on the issue, or it may constitute an effort at making the book popular with both proponents and critics of divination alike, or perhaps both. It seems, however, that the mechanism of the lottery game, if examined in the light of the work as a whole, is meant to steer the player/reader towards a specific conclusion about the relationship between divination and one of its problematic corollaries: the idea of personal and moral responsibility.
- 16 Although the mechanism of chance has a role to play in the lottery game, it is framed by instances of player agency: the spinning of the pointer on the one hand, and the reading of the lottery verse and of the emblem on the other, both constituting voluntary actions undertaken freely. As Wither himself emphasises, "every man hath his choice, whether hee will make use of those Lotteries or no" (A3r). Contrary to the axiomatic belief in the determinacy of fate that underlies the practice of divination, the game presupposes an active player who may well be assigned a disappointing or humiliating lot, but who makes a deliberate choice to take that risk beforehand. Furthermore, once the lot is drawn, the player, in Wither's words, "must beare their Fortunes, be they Good, or Ill" ("A Direction, shewing how they who are so disposed, shall find out their Chance, in the Lotteries aforegoing"). The advice to endure one's misfortune patiently, and the idea that one ought to take responsibility for one's choices, even though chance may play a role in one's circumstances, is mirrored in a large number of emblems throughout the *Collection*.¹¹ Even more prominently perhaps, the emblems and the lottery verses often suggest that good fortune is not, in fact, a contingent stroke of luck, but the just reward for those who lead a virtuous life, and that virtue, patience, and wisdom have the power to overthrow whatever adverse fortune may befall them (e.g. emblems I-6; II-47; or IV-10). Instead of envisioning a predetermined world in which bearing one's lot requires merely a passive stance towards one's inevitable and foreseeable destiny, Wither's emblems are decidedly coloured by Stoic precepts, and advocate undertaking active and voluntary efforts to be wise, prudent, and patient, a virtuous path on which readers may take their first steps by spinning the lottery pointer and heeding the advice that is thus bestowed upon them. As Warhaft puts it in an article exploring the connection between Stoicism, ethics, and learning in 17th century England:

[...] virtue was not to be confused with mere abstention from evil, or with passive, ignorant inaction before the temptations and trials of the world. It was rather an enlightened and dynamic force, which, based on knowledge, actively directed the reason and the will to choose the good (83).

- 17 The lottery game therefore invites interaction with the volume both on a physical and on an intellectual level, thus endowing the player with the capacity of choice and with the responsibility of bearing the consequences where the outcome is not predetermined. More than a mere pastime, the lottery is a ludic and interactive simulation of life's trials, one that does not entirely repudiate divinatory practices but nonetheless encourages the reader to become, as Bacon puts it, "the architect of his own fortune" (Bacon 1908: 184).
- 18 Once it has outlined the basic pattern to be followed for the players, the section titled "Direction shewing how they who are so disposed, shall find out their Chance, in the Lotteries aforegoing" (last folio V) introduces special rules of the game that apply exclusively to the royal family and to the upper classes. Although these appear to be consistent with Wither's flattering, at times even ingratiating, dedications in *A Collection of Emblemes*,¹² closer scrutiny of the lottery game may reveal a far more politically subversive side to the game.

"Personages of High Degree": Playing with Power?

- 19 Throughout his literary career, Wither was no stranger to political and social outrage, or, for that matter, to the ensuing consequences. As mentioned earlier, when *A Collection of Emblemes* was published in 1635, Wither had already been imprisoned at least twice in 1614 and 1621 following the publication of his *Abuses Stript and Whipt* (1611) and of *Wither's Motto* (1621) respectively, which seemingly personally offended high-ranking members of the Jacobean court, even though neither text mentioned anyone by name, and despite Wither's adamant protestations that he intended merely to castigate abstract vices, rather than any specific person who may exhibit them (French 1930: 960-1). Given the increasingly tense social context during Charles I's "personal rule" in the late 1620s and throughout the 1630s, it is understandable that Wither was treading lightly. It could hardly have escaped his attention, for instance, that, only two years prior to the publication of his emblem book, his immediate contemporary William Prynne was sentenced to have his ears cut off and fined five thousand pounds for an allegedly seditious work titled *Histrionastix* (c. 1633), which, his accusers claimed, criticised and satirised Charles I's Catholic Queen consort Henrietta Maria (*Oxford DNB*: "Prynne, William"). It is therefore not surprising that, despite his gleeful anticipation of the humiliation visited upon a player who would have been assigned a particularly fitting lot,¹³ Wither would provide a loophole for the more powerful among his potential readers. Any chance of suffering such embarrassment is effectively cancelled when the player is of royal blood or a person of "High degree", who "will professe our Authors [friend] to be":

If King, Queene, Prince, or any one that springs
 From Persons, knowne to be deriv'd from Kings,
 Shall seeke, for Sport sake, hence to draw their Lot;
 Our Author sayes; that, hee provided not
 For such as those: Because, it were too much
 For him, to find out Fortunes, fit for such,
 Who, (as hee thinkes) should rather, Ayde, supply
 For him, to mend his evill Fortunes by.
 To them, hee, therefore pleased is to give
 This noble and this large Prerogative;

That, they shall chuse from hence, what Lots they please,
 And make them better, if they like not these.
 All other Personages, of High degree,
 That, will professe our Authors friends to be,
 This Freedome, likewise have; that, till they find
 A Lot, which is agreeing to their mind,
 They shall have libertie, anewe, to try
 Their sought-for Chance: [...] (last folio V)

- 20 But is this “noble and [...] large Prerogative” granted to the powerful as socially and politically conservative as it seems? Such unmitigated submission would be surprising coming from Wither, whom David Norbrook has termed a “Levelling poet” (1991) and who joined the Parliamentary side during the Civil War, even under threat of renewed incarceration. In fact, Wither did not shy away from directly attacking Sir Richard Onslow, an influential MP, in his *Justitiarius Justificatus* (1646), nor did he refrain from violently criticising the Cavalier Parliament in *Vox Vulgi* (1661), and was jailed for several months each time (French 1930: 962-4). Although his subversive intent may be more subtle in the lottery game, its presence is still arguably corroborated by textual and structural evidence.
- 21 First, even merely visually, the “Direction, shewing how they who are so disposed, shall find out their Chance, in the Lotteries aforegoing” is divided into two very distinct sections. The basic instructions as to the operation of the lottery are written in prose and cover the first half of the page, whereas the rules applying only to royalty and the nobility appear as two stanzas in verse below them (Figure 3). Although Wither lends his voice to a persona in other prose texts in his *Collection of Emblemes* (Tung 2010), the pragmatic and straightforward tone of the former, as well as the merely instructive content, suggest that the antecedent of the first-person pronoun at the antepenultimate line of the prose section can safely be assumed to be the author himself. It is all the more striking that the poem then immediately abandons the first-person address and refers to Wither in the third person, as “Our Author”, throughout. The same is notable in the opening verse of the *Collection*, titled “A Preposition to this Frontispiece”, which, as was mentioned before, several scholars have analysed as an elaborate poetic riddle whose trustworthiness is questionable at best. This shift strongly suggests that Wither switches voices in between the two sections, and that it is his often ambivalent and tongue-in-cheek persona, and not the poet in person, that addresses the reader in the poem, the contents of which ought, therefore, to be viewed with relative suspicion.

Figure 3: Instructions for use. *A Collection of Emblemes, Ancient and Moderne...* Printed by A[ugustine] M[athewes] for Robert Milbourne, and are to be sold at the Grayhound in Pauls Church-yard, MDCXXXV, last folio (v)

Source: The British Library; STC 1161:13.

- 22 Second, although the “noble and [...] large Prerogative” that is enjoyed by the noblest among potential players sets them apart from the rest of Wither’s readership, it is nonetheless a concession that Wither’s persona charitably, if generously, grants them, and not a privilege that would naturally fall to them. Although it appears to mimic the social hierarchy that exists in the real world, it is also worth remembering that this special set of rules is embedded, again, in the “temporary sphere of activity” (Huizinga 1980: 8) that constitutes play — in this case, the lottery game —, which is itself part of the microcosm of *A Collection of Emblemes*¹⁴. Within this fashioned space, it is Wither’s persona who is the sole and final arbiter of Fortune’s grasp on the players: the common reader must “beare their Fortunes, be they Good, or Ill”, while players of royal or noble blood may “chuse from hence, what Lots they please, / And make them better, if they like not these”, but only insofar as “our Author” is “pleased to give them” this prerogative, which is “noble and [...] large” by the persona’s own decree. Furthermore, the poem immediately emphasises that this privilege is not intrinsic to one’s social status, but rather predicated upon the player’s relationship to “our Author”. The first stanza claims that the latter included the special rules

Because it were too much
For him, to find out Fortunes, fit for such,
Who, (as hee thinkes) should, rather, Ayde supply
For him, to mend his evill Fortunes by.

- 23 These lines echo Wither’s dedication of Book I of his *Collection* to the King and Queen, throughout which he praises both as “double-treble-foure-fold emblems”, which “more Vertues might convey, / Than many Volumes, of these Emblems, may”, and may be

read as the humble concession of a man submitting to the moral authority of his betters, who would help him tread on the path of virtue and thus "mend his evill Fortunes".

- 24 Another leitmotiv in Wither's dedications to members of the court and gentry is a more pragmatic concern: that of his financial situation. Although still veiled in euphemisms such as "[I] please to favour me, / When I growe old, and, You a Man shall be" in his epistle to the young princes Charles and James, Wither's need for pecuniary aid is expressed outright in his poem to Philip of Pembroke in the dedication of book IV, where he deplores "that my estate grew lesse, / (By more than twice five hundred Marks decrease)". A *Collection of Emblemes* even includes a peculiar section unequivocally titled "A Supersedeas to all them, whose custome it is, without any deserving, to importune Authors to give unto them their Bookes", in which Wither stresses the expense involved in publishing the work, as well as his precarious circumstances. When the persona therefore states that players belonging to the royal house "should, rather, Ayde supply, / For him [Wither], to mend his evill Fortunes by", the polysemy of the term "Fortunes" is one more vector of playful ambivalence, suggesting that the poet is expecting more than merely moral assistance from the monarch and his family, but also, crucially, that the concession of the "noble and [...] large Prerogative" with respect to the lottery game is, in fact, predicated on both moral and pecuniary assistance being forthcoming. This *quid pro quo* logic is made even clearer in the second stanza of the poem, where "Personages of High degree" are indeed exempted from the consequences of lots that are unsatisfactory to them, but notably only if they "professe, our Authors friends to be", the latter noun here being another euphemism for "patron". It appears, then, that the privilege in question is granted not on the basis of social status, but rather on that of financial liberality towards the author. It is worth bearing in mind at this stage that the "noble and [...] large Prerogative" merely entails the possibility to exchange whatever lot one obtains if one is dissatisfied with it — or, if the lottery is used as a parlour game in accordance with Wither's intentions, if one anticipates mockery or humiliation for having drawn a particularly fittingly withering emblem. Within the self-contained, ludic space of the game, where it is "our Author" who "find[s] out Fortunes" for his players, the stern power structure of Caroline England is momentarily shifted in favour of the destitute poet. If Stephen Greenblatt is correct in asserting that the "quintessential sign" of power "is the ability to impose one's fictions upon the world" (1980: 33), then, within the limited scope of his game, Wither playfully manages to arrogate a symbolic and trivial, but arguably still somewhat subversive, portion of the same. This subversive process is made possible, one might argue, by the tacit constraints that the very nature of a game places upon participants. As Huizinga puts it,

The player who trespasses against the rules or ignores them is a "spoil-sport." The spoil-sport is not the same as the false player, the cheat; for the latter pretends to be playing the game and, on the face of it, still acknowledges the magic circle. It is curious to note how much more lenient society is to the cheat than to the spoil-sport. This is because the spoil-sport shatters the play-world itself. By withdrawing from the game he reveals the relativity and fragility of the play-world in which he had temporarily shut himself with others. He robs play of its illusion — a pregnant word which means literally "in-play" (from *inlusio*, *illudere* or *inludere*). Therefore he must be cast out, for he threatens the existence of the play-community. (Huizinga 1980: 11)

- 25 Crucially, the “noble and [...] large Prerogative” presupposes participation in the game: even players of royal or noble blood *must* actually spin the pointer and engage with the lottery to be able to assess their given lot, and to either keep it or exchange it. If they refuse to participate in the game, they are akin to Huizinga’s “spoil-sports”, and although they may not be “cast out” in any physical sense, they will be *de facto* excluded from the game, which is henceforth going to be played in their absence. If they consent to play, however, they must consent to its “illusion” and submit to Wither’s rules. Furthermore, the “Prerogative” itself, “noble and [...] large” though it may seem, is very much a double-edged sword. To make use of it upon drawing a lot that is unsatisfactory — which, in the context of the lottery used as a parlour game, should be understood as one that would elicit mockery or humiliation, be it outright or merely within the minds of the other participants — implies rejection of said lot, which entails, of course, a tacit recognition that it does, in fact, “strike a chord”, thereby vindicating Wither’s subversive and tongue-in-cheek intent either way.
- 26 This subversive use of play has an advantage over acts of merely textual insubordination: as was noted earlier, participation in the lottery game presupposes an active and responsible choice to do so, which is clearly epitomised by the required interaction with the pointer on the last page of the volume. Even this simple mechanical aspect is made subservient to Wither’s rhetoric of player responsibility: as the poet puts it in his “Occasion, Intention, and use of the Foure Lotteries...”, people who are “worthily suspected of Haynous crimes and Scandalous conversations” are duly warned “either to forbear these Lotteries; or to excuse [the author] if they be justly shamed by their own Act”. Anyone who engages in the game is therefore responsible for whatever ensues, and Wither can disclaim any ill intention on his part: players who are humiliated and mocked as part of the game “therin make their owne Libels”, and “may be laughed at without my [Wither’s] blame”. This measure of self-preservation implemented by a man who has previously experienced particularly severe conditions of imprisonment (French 1930: 961) is remarkable in that it testifies to Wither’s profound understanding of, and deep confidence in, the “absolute and peculiar order” that naturally emerges from participation in a game, and which will be upheld by willing players, as “the least deviation from it ‘spoils the game’, robs it of its character and makes it worthless” (Huizinga 1980: 10).
- 27 Although most of the emblems simply convey general moral advice, some of them may nonetheless have justified such pre-emptive safeguards on Wither’s part. Emblem I-32, for instance, asserts that a virtuous King is “ready, [...] to advance, / The Lib’rall Arts, and from his Lands to drive, / All false Religion, Schisme, and Ignorance” — perhaps a thinly veiled critique of the decline of literary and artistic patronage under the Caroline monarchy (Parry 2008: 136), and of the King’s policies intended to “to ensure the dominance of Laudian Arminianism in English religious life” (Reeve 1989: 62), which, along with his marriage to the fervently Catholic French princess Henrietta Maria, deeply angered the English Calvinist factions and fostered the widespread belief in a “popishly inspired plot to undermine the English constitution” (Hughes 91). Wither himself is certainly no Calvinist, as is made clear in emblem II-33 (Figure 4): although the motto, “What ever God did fore-decree, / Shall, without faile, fulfilled be” (Wither 1635: 83), appears to be a direct endorsement of the Calvinist doctrine of double-predestination, the *subscriptio* strongly mitigates this initial statement. Indeed, the text acknowledges that God’s decrees are immutable, but adds that

[...] in [God's] Will-reveal'd, my Reason, sees
 Thus much, of his Immutable-decrees :
 That, him, a Doome-ernall, reprobatheth,
 Who scorneth Mercie ; or, Instruction hateth,
 Without Repenting : And, that, whensoever,
 A Sinner true amendment, shall indeavour ;
 Bewaile his Wickednesse, and, call for grace ;
 There shall be, for Compassion, time, and place.
 And, this, I hold, a branch of that Decree,
 Which, Men may say, shall never changed be. (Wither 1635: 895)

Figure 4: Emblem II-33. *A Collection of Emblemes, Ancient and Moderne...* Printed by A[ugustine] M[atthewes] for Robert Milbourne, and are to be sold at the Grayhound in Pauls Church-yard, MDCXXXV, page 95

Source: The British Library; STC 1161:13.

- 28 Divine Providence has, indeed, established an unchangeable decree to govern creation, but, somewhat ironically, a “branch” of that decree provides that one may still earn the Lord’s “compassion”, and thus effectively change and improve one’s fate. In other words, what is immutable about it is... that it is not. Neither does Wither endorse, or claim allegiance to, the doctrine of Arminianism, as he points out in a much later work, his *Parallellogrammaton* (1662), where he states the following about the doctrine of Universal Redemption:

I know many in these times (some of them in other respects very good and learned men) who think Universal Redemption to be a new Doctrine, terming it Arminianism and Popery ; but, it is neither new, nor repugnant (as is pretended) to the Orthodox Doctrine of Election, Predestination and the Free Grace of GOD; [...] So far is it also from being a Novelty (as ignorant hearers are made believe) that it was received and professed for a necessary Truth by the Churches of GOD in all Ages since Christ’s birth, and contradicted by very few in the first times of Christianity. Yea, it was believed many hundreds of years before Arminius was born, or Popery

had a being in the world [...]. It is, I confess, a Doctrine imbraced by many in the Church of Rome, but that makes it not erroneous. (Withers 1662: 62)

- 29 This last quote epitomises both Wither's denominational independence and his presumably heartfelt desire for social cohesion and religious toleration in England, a wish clearly expressed in his dedication of Book 1 of the *Collection on Emblemes* to King Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria, respectively the Head of the Church of England and a fervent Roman Catholic:

For, as you, Both, Prime Children are of those
Two Sister-Churches, betwixt whom, yet growes
Vnseemly strife; So, You, perhaps, may be
An Emblem, how those MOTHERS may agree. (folio 3^v)

- 30 These statements are remarkable, both on account of their diplomatic pragmatism and of the political courage they embody. Other instances of a similar nature include emblem I-5, headed by the motto "That Kingdome will establish'd bee, / Wherein the People well agree" (Wither 1635: 5), which asserts that the king ought to ensure that his subjects are "freely tributary" to his power and uphold social cohesion. At a time of increasingly tense political and religious conflicts in England which would culminate in the Civil War only a few years later, such advice would undoubtedly have been liable to draw accusations of sedition, especially given the — grimly accurate — prophetic tone of the final couplet: "where this Duty long neglect, they shall; / The King will suffer, and, the Kindome fall" (5).
- 31 It is impossible to ascertain to what extent the royal family and the nobility paid any attention to *A Collection of Emblemes*. Its success with the English readership at large is attested by the circulation of at least six variants of the volume in 1635, and later by the publication of a "pirated" version of the emblems, presumably by Nathaniel Crouch (see the introduction by Freeman in Wither 1975: xvi-xvii), by the inclusion of the work in William London's *Catalogue of the most Vendible Books in England* (1658: 122), and by a peculiar reference to the collection in a work by Dutch painter Edward Collier titled "Still Life with a Volume of Wither's 'Emblemes'" (1696). There is no evidence that the work underwent any kind of censorship, or that Wither had to answer for its contents in any way. Whether this testifies to its ultimate harmlessness, or perhaps to the subtlety of a subversive lottery game, is a question that is for each of Wither's individual readers to decide. As the poet puts it himself in his epistle "To the Reader", he leaves "You, to accept of these Play-games as you please".

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NOTES

1. For in-depth discussions of emblems and emblem books, see Praz (1939), Spica (1996), and Manning (2002), among many others.
2. In his introduction to the 1989 facsimile edition of *A Collection of Emblemes*, Michael Bath mentions that, in the Stirling Maxwell copy which is held at the Glasgow University Library and was used as the original, "the lottery is remarkably well-preserved, and the pointer still attached" (Wither 1989 : 11).
3. Among many other examples of this kind, the end of lottery I-5 reads "Looke, what thine Emblem counsell's thee", lottery I-8 says "See, what your Emblem hath injoy'n'd", and lottery II-5 urges the reader to "Marke, what thine Emblem teaches thee."
4. The fascinating website *Architecture of the Book* (or *ArchBook* for short), hosted by the University of Saskatchewan in Canada (<https://drc.usask.ca/projects/archbook/index.php>), defines the *volvelle* as: "A unique codex technology, the *volvelle* consists of one or more layers of parchment or paper discs and shapes fastened to a leaf, allowing for each individual layer to be rotated independently of the other components. The *volvelle* allows the reader to perform calculations or discover additional information through the rotation of the pieces, which work in conjunction with an illustrated base printed directly on the leaf. Generally, the parts bear text or illustrations

and are anchored to the page with string; some *volvelles* include a decorative cap fastened with glue to cover the knot on the reverse page. The name derives from the Latin *volvere*, meaning “to turn,” and variant names include wheel charts, information wheels, and rundells. The volvelle first appeared in thirteenth-century England, but gained prominence in Germany to become one of the earliest known examples of a movable book part. Its ingenuity allowed for greater interaction between reader and text, conveying information through a more dynamic delivery system.” (<https://drc.usask.ca/projects/archbook/volvelles.php>)

5. Wither states that he invented the game “to advance their [the booksellers’] Profits, rather than to satisfie [his] owne judgement” (A1v).

6. When *A Collection of Emblemes* was published in 1635, Wither had already been imprisoned twice, perhaps even three times. His two stays on record at the Marshalsea prison were both due to influential courtiers believing that his *Abuses Stript and Whipt* (1613) and *Wither’s Motto* (1621) contained concealed personal attacks against them. Wither always protested that it was untrue, but served a total of at least thirteen months behind bars. See French (1930) and O’Callaghan (2014).

7. In the section titled “The Occasion, Intention, and use of the Foure Lotteries adjyned to these foure Books of Emblemes” (A2r-A3r), Wither calls the game a “Morall Pastime” and a “Recreation”, which, he assures, will be “as harmlesse as any if it be used according to [his] intentions”. In his epistle “To the Reader” (A1r-A2r), he even claims that his “Play-Game” was “but accidentally composed”.

8. The “Preposition to this Frontispiece” is a poem that appears on the first page of the volume, in which Wither — or rather, Wither’s tongue-in-cheek poetic persona — claims that he commissioned something completely different, but that the engraver had “[mistaken] quite / The true Designe”, and that, “(with paines, and cost) / The first intended FRONTISPIECE, is lost.” The persona then continues to state that, while being far from the one that was intended, the frontispiece, despite its “Errors and Confusions” [...] fitted many Fantasies / Much better, then [sic] what Reason can devise”, and that the artist had, upon closer examination and albeit unwittingly, created an “Object of Delight”. Bath (1994: 115) and Corbett and Norton (1964: 186-8) interpret Wither’s dismissive comments as a rhetorical strategy, a “far-fetched conceit with the engraver as an Aunt Sally or tacit accomplice” (Corbett & Norton 1964: 188), and conclude that both the frontispiece and the “Preposition” were perhaps designed as “riddles for the ingenious reader” (188). See also Le Duff (2020).

9. Kelly provides a summary of a passage in the *Tiers Livre*, in which Pantagruel’s friend Panurge uses the process of bibliomancy in the works of Vergil to decide whether he should marry. However, the efficiency of the oracle is undermined by the widely differing interpretations that he and his companions attach to the verse towards which he is directed. Ultimately, these interpretations all suggest, of course, that Panurge will end up a cuckold (Kelly 2011: 42). The passage discussing the “sors Virgilianes” in the *Tiers Livre* is found in chapters X-XII.

10. Capp states that Astrology in England reached its “full maturity” only in the middle of the 17th century, but that it was also “beginning to part company with astronomy, mathematics, medicine and the whole mainstream of scientific development” at that point (Capp 1979: 20). He also attests to the popularity of printed almanacs throughout the 17th century: as late as the 1660s, 400,000 copies of such works were purchased in England annually, “a figure which suggests that roughly one family in three bought an almanac each year” (23). The controversies about divination were mostly religious, as its critics associated it with witchcraft, but it also raised concerns about the existence of moral freedom in a world in which all events would be predetermined in the stars (131-144).

11. Constancy, and more precisely the patient endurance of hardship, is a recurring credo in Wither’s emblems. Mottoes such as “With Patience, I the Storme sustaine; / For Sun-shine still

doth follow Raine" (emblem I-26) or "No Inward Griefe, nor outward Smart, / Can overcome a Patient-Heart" (emblem I-28) occur frequently throughout the *Collection*.

12. Each book of *A Collection of Emblemes* is dedicated to one or several members of the Caroline court: Book I to the King and Queen, Book II to the young princes Charles and James, Book III to the Duchess Dowager of Richmond and to the Duke of Lennox, and Book IV to Philip of Pembroke and to the Earl of Holland.

13. In his instructions pertaining to the game, Wither states that "Some will think perhaps, that I have purposely invented this Game, that I might finde means to reprove mens vices, without being suspected, (as I have hitherto unjustly beene) to ayme at particular persons: For, if any who are notoriously Guiltie, shall by drawing their Chances, among other companions, be so fitted with Lots, (which may now and then happen) that those Vices be thereby intimated to the by-standers, of which the world knowes them guilty; they do therin make their own Libels; and, may (I hope) be laughed at without blame. If not; I doe here warne all such as are worthily suspected of Haynous crimes and Scandalous conversations, either to forbear these Lotteries; or to excuse me if they be justly shamed by their own Act." (A3r)

14. The lottery dial that is intended to indicate to the players in which of the four books their emblem is to be sought is divided into four sections, each bearing the name of a cardinal point. Furthermore, a similar idea emerges from Wither's use of an architectural metaphor to describe his work, where each of the four books would constitute one side to a building. See Bath (1994: 122-3).

ABSTRACTS

George Wither, a notoriously controversial poet of the 17th century, wrote in the introductory text to his *Collection of Emblemes* in 1635 that he was adding a "harmless [...] recreation", referring to the lottery game he included in his book, which contains two hundred emblems. Wither goes to great length to claim that his lottery is merely an innocent pastime that was added to the work to make it less "over-solid and serious", but a careful examination of the game in relation to the rest of the volume reveals a more complex rhetorical and aesthetic purpose. The lottery game is allegorically represented in the middle of the frontispiece on the first page of the book, an intricate engraving by William Marshall representing the pilgrimage of life on the paths of virtue and vice, where the pilgrims draw their metaphorical lots from an ewer under the supervision of Fortune personified. As the frontispiece can be read as an emblematic representation of the volume, this *mise-en-abyme* contradicts the poet's assertions about the lottery's incidental nature, and therefore raises questions on its true place in the work. Through his game, Wither establishes a close, personal, often tongue-in-cheek and multi-faceted relationship with his readers, addressing them directly and creating the impression that the broad and general advice provided in the emblems is in fact tailored to their very personal needs. It is an original vector for social criticism and satire, and mirrors the author's own religious and philosophical ambiguities with respect to notions such as free will, personal responsibility, and fortune. It grants the emblems a theatrical, dynamic, and social dimension that testifies to Wither's profound understanding of the rhetorical possibilities granted to him both by the emblematic genre and by the nature of a game.

George Wither, poète anglais controversé du dix-septième siècle, écrit dans l'un des textes d'introduction à son œuvre *A Collection of Emblemes* en 1635 qu'il ajoutait un « divertissement [...] innocent », faisant référence au jeu de loterie qu'il avait inclus dans l'ouvrage, un livre de deux cents emblèmes. Wither insiste sur le caractère innocent de sa loterie, et affirme qu'il n'a consenti à l'inclure dans le volume que pour que celui-ci soit moins aride et moralisateur. Néanmoins, une analyse du jeu à la lumière du volume dans son intégralité permet de discerner son rôle au sein d'un projet rhétorique et esthétique complexe. La loterie fait l'objet d'une représentation méta-emblématique au centre du frontispice de l'ouvrage, une imposante gravure de l'artiste William Marshall qui représente le pèlerinage de la vie, tantôt sur le chemin du vice, tantôt sur celui de la vertu. Lorsque les pèlerins atteignent la croisée des chemins, sous la supervision de dame Fortune, ils plongent la main dans une urne afin d'y trouver le lot qui les accompagnera tout au long du périple. Le jeu de loterie fait ainsi partie intégrante du volume, et ne peut être relégué à une simple annexe ludique, nonobstant ce qu'en dit l'auteur. À travers le jeu, Wither construit une relation interpersonnelle complexe avec ses lecteurs, s'adresse à eux directement et crée l'impression que les emblèmes, malgré leur portée générale, constituent en réalité des conseils et des avertissements personnalisés à l'égard des joueurs à qui le sort les aura réservés. De plus, la spécificité du jeu permet à Wither d'exprimer ses opinions parfois subversives, mais également de participer à un débat philosophique de son époque, celui du libre-arbitre, de la responsabilité individuelle et de la fortune. Le jeu de loterie confère aux emblèmes une dimension théâtrale et dynamique qui témoigne du potentiel rhétorique de l'activité ludique, potentiel dont Wither avait saisi la subtilité.

INDEX

Keywords: emblems, Wither George, lottery game, games, satire, rhetoric

Mots-clés: Wither George, emblèmes, jeu de loterie, jeux, satire, rhétorique

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