Clashes of discourses: Humanists and Calvinists in seventeenth-century academic Leiden
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Conclusions

When I had finished my initial reading for this project and felt I had a first grasp of the material at hand, I formulated my research question for myself as: can the Synod of Dordt and the coup d’État of Maurice of Orange be described as a Foucauldian event, and if so, what advantages are there of doing so? I hoped that my approach could contribute to our project on Neo-Latin and the vernacular from a broad perspective. I do admit that my initial idea was that the use of Latin would fit one side of the discursive field and the use of Dutch the opposite side. Of course, I was aware that this is a generalization, but I felt it worthwhile exploring nonetheless. The conclusion quite naturally has to be that reality is more complicated than my scheme had anticipated. For every generalization I could think of, at least two examples could be named that would contradict my schematic abstractions. I have often thought it was best to abandon the whole idea of my initial research question.

However, every time I returned to the texts that set me on this path in the first place, I found that my Foucauldian / Greenblattian interpretation still offered good explanations for certain irregularities in the works and biographies of my authors. And so I have persisted with my interpretation of the changes in the intellectual climate of the Leiden humanists as part of an événement. Three items buttressed this idea. The first was the article by Baker, already cited, who has, as an intellectual exercise, made a brief Foucauldian interpretation of the French Revolution. Although he analysed the discursive changes and the discursive field from a different point of view, it showed me that it was possible to see a coup as an événement. This point was supported by the words of Foucault himself in his *Ordre du discours*, in which he clearly states that every discursive tension in the end finds its solution in the physical world. However, most convincing for me was the impression made by the texts of the authors in my corpus and their biographies – whether I compare both introductions of Cats’s *Proteus*, or Heinsius’s early poetry with his hymn to Christ, or read in Nellen’s biography of Grotius how he was incapable of understanding his adversaries and often misjudged the situation he found himself in, these oppositions often gave me the impression that these protagonists lived in different universes and spoke different languages, each completely logical and sensible in its own
orbit, but entirely wrong and unacceptable in the opponent’s universe. Foucault and Greenblatt formulated concepts that helped me explain my crude imagination and also to identify and describe developments and processes that I had not yet seen.

Greenblatt’s ideas of a social poetics proved very useful to identify the different discourses and to relate individual authors and their works to Foucault’s abstract notions of discourses and discursive change. According to Greenblatt it is possible to use every historical artifact as representation of a given period and to describe that period by means of that artifact. It should only be borne in mind that we describe by means of these representations small parts of a culture. However, great works of art form an exception, as they represent widely shared cultural values. Literary works in particular can, according to Greenblatt, be accepted as valuable representations of cultural period. They represent these values, as the author himself (or herself) was formed by the cultural values of his (her) culture. At the same time, authors comment in their literary works on their culture. And by doing so, they influence their culture. This way, literary works are highly useful to detect discursive changes as they both represent and catalyze these processes.

So the answer to the first part of my original research question is that it is possible to describe the coup d’état of Maurice of Orange and the Synod of Dordt of 1618-1620 as an événement, a result of a discursive change. I have described the tensions in the discursive field in terms of an opposition of a humanist discourse and a Calvinist discourse.\(^{264}\) I have explained that these terms do not characterize individual beliefs or abilities. Many humanists were (orthodox) Calvinists, many Calvinists great Latinists. However, as shown in Chapter 1, the humanist discourse has as its central authority the classical world, whereas the Calvinist discourse refers primarily to the Bible and Calvinist doctrine (Chapter 2).

Having provided a positive response to the first part of my original question, namely whether the Synod of Dordt can be described in Foucauldian terms, the second half, what advantages this approach offers, remains unanswered. The main advantage of a Foucauldian /

\(^{264}\) I am aware that the names I chose for the two opposing discourses are closely related to the part of the discourse I investigated, namely the scholarly / literary field of the Leiden humanists. A political historian might well have preferred other names.
Greenblattian approach is that it moves the focus from the author to the dynamics between history, society, and individual and especially how the individual is affected and becomes the scene of historical, social, and intellectual developments, evolutions, revolution. To put forward an obvious example, it is easy to describe Heinsius’s career and the choices he made from a point of view that emphasizes his personal interests. Heinsius was an enthusiastic Greek and Latin poet who was able to embark upon an academic career with the aid of Scaliger, but changed his colours when the situation grew bad and joined the Counter-Remonstrant cause to protect his career. However, this line of thought always ends with the question: what were Heinsius’s true motives, his true thoughts? If we wish to avoid the sin of the intentional fallacy, the author disappears into the historical distance. But it is possible to describe the persona of the poet and to see it as a representation of certain discourse. A poetical persona is moulded in the dynamics of discursive change, it is an individual expression of the discursive field. In the case of Heinsius this means that he may or may not have behaved in a brave or cowardly fashion, true or untrue to his former or new beliefs – his works reflect the tensions in the discursive field, his changing persona is an expression of the discursive change.

The same line of thought would help in solving the problem of Vossius’s convictions. At the end of his interesting article about the religious turmoil of the Twelve Years’ Truce, Rademaker criticizes scholars who consider Vossius to be Remonstrant, whereas, according to Rademaker, ‘[…] he [Vossius], at the very core of his belief, remained true to traditional teaching of the Church, […].’ The proof Rademaker adduces is a letter from Vossius of 1640 and the fact that Vossius never joined the Remonstrant Brotherhood. I have my questions about these arguments, as by 1640 the Counter-Remonstrants had long prevailed and it could be very worthwhile to look at one’s own past from an adjusted perspective, and the fact that at the time of the troubles there was not yet a Remonstrant Brotherhood, the Remonstrants considered themselves to be part of the same Protestant Church as the Counter-Remonstrants, and they only wanted to change the rules. What is more, if Vossius was such a

265 Rademaker, “At the Heart of the Twelve Years’ Truce Controversies: Conrad Vorstius, Gerardus Vossius and Hugo Grotius”, 487.
convinced Counter-Remonstrant, why was he dismissed in 1618? The answer, I propose, is first of all that it is impossible to say what Vossius’s true belief was. However, we do see him participating in the humanist discourse. Whatever his beliefs on predestination (personally I find him quite prevaricatory in the letter cited), Vossius clearly had a humanist outlook on the world. His whole life would be dedicated to the dissemination of knowledge of the classical world. His own contribution to solving the conflict is also clearly one belonging to the humanist discourse, namely writing a scholarly critical historical text. Just as Gomarus singled out Bertius immediately as ‘Orateur’, Vossius was recognizable to any member of the Calvinist discourse as representing the humanist discourse, whatever his beliefs at the core may have been. I could even argue that his letter of 1640 is a representation of the post-Synod discourse and as such constitutes another representation of the changed discourse.

Apart from these methodological conclusions, my central conclusion is, almost redundantly, that there was a particular humanist discourse among the Leiden scholars and that it had to change under the pressure of the Calvinist discourse. This Leiden humanist discourse was unique in two aspects. It was unique in the Dutch context – only at Leiden University did a shared enthusiasm exist where the ideals of imitation and emulation of the classical (and humanist) examples were collectively and constantly put into practice at such a high level. Naturally, much of this accomplishment can be accounted for by Dousa, Lipsius, and Scaliger. The saying that the Muses found a home at Leiden was used more than once (Scaliger and Heinsius) and nicely illustrates both the idealistic and the classical and the pagan (i.e. not expressly Christian) character of the Leiden humanist enterprise. The other aspect of its uniqueness is the specifically Dutch constellation of this humanist discourse. As has been said, it shared all the essential characteristics of the international Republic of Letters. However, it became conflated with concepts of the liberal urban social and intellectual elite of Holland. It became the vehicle for the party that believed that the Revolt was more about liberty than religion and felt they were best represented by the Provincial States of Holland and West Frisia. As the marriage poems by Grotius in particular have shown (Chapter 1), the Leiden humanist discourse was also the expression of a certain Batavian enthusiasm, a nationalism that tried to imitate and
emulate the ancients not only in terms of literature, but also in the craft of statesmanship, as can be learned from the various ‘comparisons’ of ancient civilizations that were written in these years.266

In order to participate in this discourse, you had to have an exceedingly extensive knowledge of Latin. A central position within this discourse could be attained to by knowledge of the classical world and the ability to write Latin well, both prose and poetry. As the bucolic translations of Heinsius and Scaliger have shown, the use and knowledge of Greek was a bonus in this category. Within this discourse, imitation and emulation could take place both in Latin and in the vernacular. The ideal of using the vernacular to show it has the same possibilities as the classical languages can be seen as a special kind of imitation and variation. It was, since Italian humanism, a standard part of the (international) humanist discourse.

From the outset, i.e. from the days of Janus Dousa, the humanist discourse stood in opposition to an orthodox Calvinist discourse. This discourse is well illustrated by the Bedenckinge of Franciscus Gomarus or the poetry of Jacobus Revius. It has a clearly identifiable authority in the fundamental Calvinist doctrinal scriptures, namely the Institutiones of John Calvin, the Belgian Confession, and the Heidelberg Catechism. The ideal of this discourse was not to revive the classical past; on the contrary, they were strongly opposed to anything remotely pagan. Its ideal was the people of Israel, led by their God through the desert. Whereas the humanist discourse was primarily institutionalized in universities and Latin schools, the Calvinist discourse had its home in the classes of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Faculties of Theology except for Leiden. Although the humanist discourse was closely connected to the upper class of Holland and had managed to determine the atmosphere at Leiden University, it was the Calvinist discourse that increasingly made itself felt in the second decade of the seventeenth century.

The second chapter showed how this discursive change affected the Leiden humanists (or some of them). The introductions of Cats’s Proteus show the two discourses standing alongside one another in the same book.

The works of Heinsius show how a pagan persona gradually became unacceptable and how Heinsius responds to this development. In his hymn to Christ, Heinsius completely adapted his style to the new discourse. His *De contemptu mortis* moves back a little as it expresses Christian themes in a Lucretian / Virgilian imitation. The importance of these works is emphasized by the fact that these are the only poems of Heinsius that are mentioned by Revius.

The third chapter described the new discursive field. Some elements had disappeared, such as the pagan persona and the enthusiastic veneration of the classical world. Some elements were given new places: Heinsius and Vossius directed ‘classical’ efforts to the curriculum of the Latin schools, the edition of proper textbooks, and the writing of grammars that would be used until the twentieth century. One element that stayed but that was slightly transformed was the introduction into the discourse of the new circle of Leiden scholars. The case of Ludovicus de Dieu demonstrated well that the general form remained intact. Introduction was by means of a scholarly publication, preferably an edition, accompanied by recommendations from an established authority in the field and either dedicated to this authority, or the authority was thanked profusely in the introduction. However, these actions served now as an introduction to a theological discourse (although the Synod had explicitly stated that *artes* scholars had to refrain from theology), by using a different referential framework.

This study has shown how the use of Foucault’s ideas about discursive change, modified by Greenblatt’s theories of cultural poetics offer an interesting approach to literary texts. As literary texts can be regarded as cultural representations, authors appear as (temporal) embodiments of their respective literary discourses. The relations and tensions between authors, their literary works, their poetical personae and their (literary) networks can give interesting insights in often compelling forces within discursive fields. In this study, only a small, though influential, network has been analyzed. The concepts used are applicable in every branch of literary studies. To compare the Leiden situation to the Amsterdam literary circles would be an interesting next step. But also the relation between the author, his poetical persona and social / religious conventions is a terrain that needs more exploration. Both approaches
would be valuable supplements to an often biographical approach of individual authors and their works.