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

*Clashes of Discourses: Humanists and Calvinists in Seventeenth-Century Academic Leiden*

This thesis describes how the literary discourse of the Leiden humanists gradually changed under growing pressure from orthodox Calvinists (Counter-Remonstrants). These changes are described with reference to Michael Foucault’s concepts of *discours* and *événement*. Maurice of Orange’s coup d’état and the Synod of Dordt (1618-1620) are the events that constitute the final step in this changing discourse, the materialization of the *événement* in the historical realm. The identification of this *événement* retrospectively enabled the identification of a discursive field at Leiden University and a search for tensions within this discourse. Division into three chapters seemed sensible: the first chapter describes the discourse of the Leiden humanists from the inauguration of Leiden University (1575) until the death of Arminius (1609). The second chapter describes the growing tensions between Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants, which leave traces in the (literary) works of Leiden humanists. Finally, a new discourse emerges after the Synod of Dordt: the third chapter describes how elements of the former discourse disappear or are rearranged. New concepts receive prominent places within this new discursive field, as do new persons.

The ideas regarding *cultural poetics*, as Stephen Greenblatt termed them in his *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, were very useful in the identification and description of this discursive change. Three of his concepts in particular were of central importance to this thesis. First of all the concept that every artefact of a certain culture can be regarded as a representation of that culture. It follows from this that a culture can be described by any object, as long as we are aware of the fact that we can describe only a limited part of this culture. It is categorically impossible to make a comprehensive description of any culture. Nonetheless, although our description may be fragmentary, and it is, this does not necessarily imply that it is untrue. The second concept is that authors who were (highly) esteemed in their own time have a higher level of representativeness than other authors, persons, or objects. Authors became popular because the reading public apparently recognized their own
thoughts and feelings in the words of these authors. It follows that texts written by widely read authors will be useful for a cultural-historical analysis. Finally, Greenblatt gave a concise description of the interaction between author and culture in his concept of cultural poetics: an author is formed by the culture and cultural values in which he is born and raised. These values find their expression in the literary works of the author. However, the author not only reproduces the values of his surroundings, but also reflects upon them. And by giving expression to these values in his works and words, the author exerts a strong influence on his culture, confirming many values, questioning others.

These three concepts from Greenblatt enabled an analysis of the changes in the discursive field of the Leiden humanists through the works of some scholars and authors who were already held in high regard in their own time, understandably with the caveat in mind that every scrap of text does have a representative value for a given culture (or discourse), and the work of representative authors even more so, but that nonetheless every description of a culture or a discourse remains fragmentary.

Chapter 1: The humanist discourse in the Northern Netherlands
The first chapter describes how Janus Dousa and Jan van Hout in particular made sure that the newly established university would be firmly rooted in the humanist discourse. Janus Dousa had been deeply impressed by Jean Dorat and the poets of the Pleiade during his *peregrinatio* in Paris. In a way, Dorat was the French exponent of Italian humanism. This discourse is characterized by its strong interest in anything pertaining to the history and culture of Classical Rome, particularly where it concerned the literary activity of the humanists themselves. When greater knowledge of Greek and about the ancient Greeks became available, this interest expanded to Classical Antiquity in general. Humanist poets tried to imitate the language and style of these Classical examples, according to the principle of *imitatio* and *aemulatio*. They also used their examples for imitation in the vernacular, either by adopting subjects, topics, and imagery, or by adapting stylistic elements from Greek and Latin literature in the vernacular. This created a whole new range of literary possibilities for humanist poets.

When Leiden was granted the right to found a university, Janus Dousa and Jan van Hout ensured that the *artes* curriculum was permeated...
with humanist values. Dousa and his *commilitiones* wanted the new university to be a temple for the Muses. This was amply evident in the pageant at the inauguration of Leiden University, where Apollo and the Muses were literally hailed in. However, this vision was not shared by all. Many felt that the primary task of the new university was to provide well-trained preachers for the Dutch Reformed (Calvinist) Church. This group was highly suspicious of the (in their eyes) heathen humanist discourse and preferred a Calvinist discourse, in which the text of the Bible, the *Heidelberg Catechism* and the *Belgian Confession* occupied centre stage.

Notwithstanding this strong opposition, Dousa managed to let his vision materialize within the walls of Leiden University and have humanism rooted firmly within the university. Dousa was particularly bolstered in this effort when he managed to hire the young Justus Lipsius. He was an enthusiastic adherent of Dousa’s ideals and contributed significantly to the development and consolidation of the humanist discourse. His departure for Louvain was a serious setback for the young university, which was nevertheless compensated by the arrival of Josephus Justus Scaliger at Leiden. He had stipulated that he only had to reside in Leiden without any teaching obligations.

Scaliger did teach small groups of elect students. Both Daniel Heinsius and Hugo Grotius belonged to this privileged club of private students. Scaliger closely watched the early careers of his favourites and helped them to build a sound reputation within the international Republic of Letters. Analysis of Heinsius’s and Grotius’s early work demonstrates the mechanisms of this process. The first step on this path to the summit of the Republic of Letters was to edit a Classical text. The debutant had to emendate an existing text and account for his choices in the notes, or *annotationes*. These provided ample scope for a display of knowledge and erudition. Liminary poetry showed the close relation between master and pupil, which in this case make manifest the fact that both Grotius and Heinsius published their texts with Scaliger’s approval. Scaliger’s reputation within the Republic of Letters gave his students a head start in their careers.

Dousa, Lipsius, and Scaliger acquired a firm place for the humanist discourse within Leiden University. However, Grotius’s marital poetry shows how this discourse became connected with a nationalist ideal. At a
time when the Dutch Republic was scarcely a unity to speak of, Grotius was using imagery in his poems that expressed a common identity. He has, for example, the goddess Batavia, as a personification of the Republic, speak on its behalf before Jupiter. In the same heavenly atmosphere we find Julius Civilis, who had led the Batavians in their uprise against the Romans. This way a language was created that characterized a local branch of the international humanist discourse, where a very specific nationalist vision was linked to the rather elite values of the Republic of Letters. It may be understood that this vision was primarily shared by a limited group from an educated patrician class with close connections to local, provincial, and even national administration. It met with scant enthusiasm from orthodox Calvinists.

Chapter 2: Growing tension
The second chapter discusses the growing influence of the Calvinist discourse and the appearance of this tension in the works of Leiden humanists. These tensions become particularly manifest at the time of the death of Arminius, who had been the leader of the Remonstrants. The obituary poems of Heinsius and Grotius seem hardly affected by these tensions. However, Grotius’s letter to Heinsius proves that both poets were impelled to maneuver in shallow waters with great care. The conflict between Bertius and Gomarus over Bertius’s funeral oration clearly shows the opposition. Whereas Bertius is still speaking in general terms about Arminius’s life and devotes many words to defending him against various sorts of allegations, Gomarus openly attacks Bertius and Arminius for their heterodoxy. In his attack, Gomarus frequently refers to the maxims of the Calvinist discourse, namely the text of the Bible, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgian Confession. What is more, he accuses Bertius of using oratory tricks, calling him an ‘Orateur’. A term that would have been a great compliment within the humanist discourse, namely to be regarded as an orator in the Classical sense of the word, was one used as a term of abuse in the Calvinist context. As Gomarus puts it, rhetoric is misleading, one should speak the Truth in plain words.

This discursive opposition can also be found in the work of an individual poet. In the works of both Heinsius and Jacob Cats, both discourses can be found in this period. In the case of Heinsius, his work certainly develops from representing a humanist discourse to representing
a Calvinist discourse. In the case of Cats this remains a probability as we cannot be absolutely sure which parts of his *Proteus* were written when. It is clear, however, that all his later work has a stronger Calvinist flavour than the erotic poetry in the *Proteus*. Heinsius’s development appears in his hymns on Bacchus and Christ. Both poems were printed in his *Nederduytsche poemata* (1616), but differ considerably. The hymn to Bacchus is a light-hearted humanist poem in which Heinsius displays his knowledge about the god of wine, mostly learned from the *Dionysiaca* by Nonnus Panopolitus. Conversely, the hymn to Christ is a devout poem, lacking any reference to the humanist tradition. The poems have been interpreted variously, especially because Heinsius himself warns the reader that any reference to heathen gods should be read allegorically. Many readers have consequently read his hymn to Christ as the expression of his true beliefs and his other poetry as youthful sin.

However, it is my conviction that neither poem should be disregarded lightly as allegory, youthful sin, or political choice. The hymn to Bacchus fits perfectly within the discourse of the Leiden humanists, to whom Heinsius belonged. Within the realm of this discourse, imitation of Classical examples, including the pagan imagery, was perfectly acceptable. Within this discourse, a poet could carve out for himself the persona of a Greek or Roman pagan poet. This was standard procedure in the *imitatio et aemulatio* tradition. After all, the humanists wanted to revive the best parts of Antiquity, and to surpass it. Grotius, Heinsius, and the younger Cats were protagonists of this discourse. However, when the tensions in the discursive field grew stronger, general opinion on this matter changed. It was increasingly felt that that the poetical *persona* of the poet had to agree with his personal beliefs. The poet’s *persona* had to be an expression of correct Calvinist doctrine, just as his public and private behaviour had to be expressions of this doctrine. Vice versa, if a *persona* deviated from Calvinist practice, this was regarded as character flaw on the part of the poet himself.

Chapter 3: A New Standard
The coup d’état of Maurice and the Synod of Dordt in 1618 constitute the final materialization of the discursive change. This event had its repercussions on the discourse of the Leiden humanists as well. The discourse that had been inaugurated by Dousa, Lipsius, and Scaliger could
no longer exist. After the Synod, strong emphasis was placed on the study of the Bible. Heinsius first writes his *Aristarchus Sacer* (1627), an impressive *critique* of Nonnus’s paraphrase of St John’s Gospel. Next, he devotes himself to a commentary on the New Testament, just as Grotius is doing in France at the same time. These cases, as well as the dedicatory letters of Ludovicus de Dieu, prove that Heinsius’s research programme was adapted to the new discourse and that Heinsius applied his knowledge and skills to a different subject.

The example of Ludovicus de Dieu further shows that certain features of the previous discourse remained in place, whilst others were replaced with new values. The introduction into a scholarly community by means of a critical edition of a canonical text with the approbation of a well-known authority within this community remains intact. However, the texts that are considered canonical and the community to which the novice has to be introduced have changed. This impression is underscored by the poet Jacobus Revius, who presents himself as a Renaissance poet yet in his poetry can really only be described as representative of a Calvinist discourse. Even his only poem that clearly imitates a Greek example has been stripped of its pagan content and transposed to a Calvinist key.

Finally, Cats’ *Twee en tachtigjarig leven* (1700) shows how certain concepts are reallocated in the discursive field, without completely disappearing. This is exemplified by Cats’ memoirs about his early erotic encounters. He already treated erotic themes in earlier works, and often in schoolmasterly fashion. Now, however, his text has been lent an unmistakeable deprecatory and admonitory voice. At the same time the incidents have been described in such vibrant detail that it may be asked whether or not the old poet missed his target. Nonetheless, it is clear the poet can no longer endeavour to cast his alleged erotic experiences in a favourable light from behind his *persona*; instead he is forced to do so in a voice filled with sorrow and regret.

Conclusions

The most important conclusion of this thesis is that a cultural / historical approach from the perspective of discursive change to the poets of the early Golden Age has been valuable within the context of the Leiden humanists. Primarily because this approach sidesteps the dangers of an overly speculative interpretation of the poets’ personal convictions and
beliefs. More important, however, is the fact that this approach has shown the enormous impact of discursive changes on individual authors. This again seems to be in accordance with Greenblatt’s social poetics, namely that poets are influenced by their cultural surroundings, simultaneously reflecting and reinforcing some of the values of these surroundings in their works. This approach can be used for any literary-historical research. The present study constitutes an initial endeavour with the analysis of a limited number of highly influential authors. It may be recommended to expand this study with similar analyses of historically and geographically contiguous networks. A first step could be the analysis of and comparison with the Amsterdam literary field. Furthermore, a structural analysis of the relationship between author, persona, and contemporary social and religious conventions would yield important information for researching identity formation. In both fields ample work remains to be done and much information could be garnered that would add new perspectives to the often biographical approaches of single historical persons and their works. Hopefully this thesis has provided an inspiring view of new possibilities in these directions.