Receptions and impact: early Modern Latin drama, its effect on the audience and its role in forming public opinion

Bloemendal, J.

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Early Modern Latin Drama, its Effect on the Audience and its Role in Forming Public Opinion

Jan Bloemendal

Such tremendous effects as the performance of Jacob Bidermann’s *Cenodoxus* had in Munich in 1609 will hardly have been an everyday outcome of the staging of an early modern Latin play.¹ It had already been successful at its first performance in the small hall of the Jesuit College at Augsburg on 3 July 1602. On that occasion it was so well received that it had to be repeated on the following day. But Augsburg paled into insignificance beside Munich, if we can believe the report made of it decades later. The hall was packed with a huge audience. At the beginning of the play the audience laughed at the comic scenes, but as the play progressed they realised the enormity of the sins portrayed and the atrocity of Hell that might well be awaiting themselves too. Fourteen members of the audience immediately went into retreat to perform the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius, and the actor who played the part of the protagonist Cenodoxus entered the *Societas Jesu* and nearly became a saint.² And many performances of the play were to follow.³

¹ This article is part of the project ‘Latin and Vernacular Cultures. Theatre and Public Opinion in the Netherlands (ca 1510–1625)’, supported by a Vidi-grant rewarded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO).
This story tells us something about the impact a play could have or was expected or hoped to have on its audience. But anyone who wishes to state this bluntly and wants to assess the impact early modern Latin drama actually had on its audience and its role in forming public opinion has some questions to answer: who made up the audience? how and to what extent did they get acquainted with drama? what do we mean by ‘impact’? what is ‘public opinion’ and how is it ‘formed’? and, finally, how can we say something more about that impact? Here the influence of one drama on other ones or the reception of a drama by other authors is assessed only inasmuch as this can tell us something about the effects it could have had on the public and its opinions. It will become clear that tentative conclusions of work in progress are being presented here, no full account of rounded off conclusions.

Latin drama and its audience

The first question, then, is what kind of people made up the audience of such a performance. In Munich Bidermann produced plays that were performed on the occasion of the annual prize-giving of the Jesuit college, and the audience included important nobles of the Bavarian court and the foremost citizens of Munich. Also, as at other performances, the audience included pupils, masters, parents, citizens of the city and the neighbourhood. In the Netherlands, especially in the northern part, the situation differed to some extent from other countries: there was actually no court nor any form of court life, so the performances of the plays took place in public places like the market before the town halls or in the Latin schools themselves, and they enjoyed no royal attention. We also have to differentiate between school plays

8 (1979), vol. 3/4, pp. 167–99, esp. 183–84, about 41 Lutheran spectators being converted to Jesuit Catholicism (‘a Lutheri hara ad ovilia nostra transiere unus et quinquaginta’ [Historia Collegii Augustani, Freiburg, Bibliothèque Cantonale et Universitaire, L. 95, p.474 on 1609]) and 184, about a protestant female spectator who was so impressed by the miracle she saw on stage, that she became a nun (‘Datī sunt aliquoties a scholarum nostrarum alumnis pii ludi. Spectabat forte cum caeteris productum in proscenium Ioannes Damascenum ancilla haeresi imbuta. Observabat accurate omnia, remque omnem vere rate geri: manum truncari, absectam a Virgine Deipara restitui, cicatricem beneficii testem haerere. Eo spectaculo flexa est domumque melior quam venerat rediit. Haeresin etiam ocus detestata in Magnae Matris clientela laeta gestiensque vivit’ [Bamberg, R.B. Msc. 65, 1, p. 87]).

4 For the moment I will use the words ‘effect’, ‘impact’, and ‘influence’ indiscriminately.

and university drama. The production of Plautus’s *Aulularia* (1508) in Louvain by students under the direction of Martinus Dorpius, who also supplied the concluding fifth act which was missing, will have attracted the attention of fellow students as well as the professors. 6 This production had such a tremendous success that it was repeated ‘in the most famous cities’, although some denigrators criticised it, and it reached a larger audience. 7 In the same way Gnaphæus’s *Acolastus* (1529) won fame all over Europe and its author, who fled from The Hague to Germany, staged his play with great success in Elbing before an audience of pupils, parents, the municipality, and clergymen. In 1595 members of the States of Zeeland attended the production of three plays by students of the University of Leiden in Middelburg. 8 The audience who attended a performance at the house of the Alkmaar minister Adolphus Venator must have been very small. 9 English and Swedish envoys were special guests who saw the production of Seneca’s *Troades* by Leiden students in 1617. 10 Not only Gnaphæus’s *Acolastus*, but also other plays found their way to stages all over the European continent. It is known for instance that Levinus Brechtus’s *Euripus* (1549) was played all over Europe. 11 It was even the case that Protestants and Roman Catholics performed and watched the same dramas. In the case of Brechtus’s *Euripus* Lutherans attended a performance by the Jesuit College at Augsburg. 12 The intended audience of the *Fabula comica*

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8 P.J. Meertens, *Letterkundig leven in Zeeland in de zestiende en de eerste helft der zeventiende eeuw*, Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche Uitgeversmaatschappij, 1943 (Verhandelingen der Nederlandsche Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afdeeling Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, Deel XLVIII, No. 1), p. 73. The plays were written by Sophocles, Seneca, and Plautus.


(1607) by Cornelius Schonaeus is relatively large. The rector of the Latin school of Haarlem wrote it for a lottery — an event regularly organised in the Netherlands of the early modern period for charity reasons, in this case for the foundation of an old men’s home —, and added ‘Voor-reden ende tusschenspraken’ (prologues and entr’actes) in Dutch. In his comical farce Bassarus (1540), Georgius Macropedius inserted some Dutch expressions for comic effect.

How did the audience get acquainted with the content of the plays? Of course, many of them saw them staged. Some members of the audience — more, however, than we might have expected — may have had some mastery of Latin, but the many of them did not know Latin or knew only ‘small Latin’. They must have had some idea of the play by summaries in the vernacular, which do exist, and by the title, the acting, the stage properties and the like. The pupils of the highest classes of the Latin school read the plays before they were staged, they commented on them and translated them. In this way these pupils, who were to become future ministers of the Church and barristers in public life, became deeply involved in what the authors wanted to say with their plays, though other recipients may have acquired their

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14 Cornelius Schonaeus, Fabula comica, in commendationem aedificii, egenis senibus, Zwolle: Zacharias Heyns, 1607. On lotteries, that were very common events in the northern Netherlands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see A. Huisman and J.M. Koppenol, Daer compt de lotery met trommels en trompetten! Loterijen in de Nederlanden tot 1726, Hilversum: Verloren, 1991 (Zeven Provinciën Reeks 3).


17 See, for example, J. Lebeau, Salvator Mundi. L’“exemple” de Joseph dans le théâtre allemand au XVIe siècle, Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1977 (Bibliotheca Humanistica et Reformatorica 20; thesis Paris 1976), ill. 5, for a few pages of Crocus’s Ioseph (1535) that were full of marginal notes by a pupil of the Latin school. The copy is now in the University Library of Jena.
knowledge of the plays’ contents from *periochae*, small programme leaflets in which one could find the title of the play, the characters — in some instances also the actors — and a summary of the contents, in Latin or in the vernacular. Another solution is to use two languages in the play: in the allegorical Latin play *Miles Christianus* (1561) by Cornelius Laurimanus, the second choral song is a paraphrase of a Psalm sung alternately in Latin and in Dutch. Schonaeus’s *Fabula comica*, with parts in Dutch, has already been mentioned. Some of the farcical plays were adaptations of medieval ‘cluyten’; for instance, Macropedius’s *Andrisca* (1537) adopted themes from *Moorkensvel* and *De cluyte van Playerwater*. Other compositions were reworkings of rhetoricians’ plays: thus from the *Elckerlijc* (*Everyman*), Christianus Ischyrius wrote a Latin version with his *Homulus* (1536) as did Macropedius with a play entitled *Hecastus* (1539). Levinus Brechtus’s *Euripus* (1549) treated the same theme, also in Latin. In that case — as in the case of plays that treated biblical stories — the audience may have been familiar with the theme.

After the performance the authors might have their plays printed. In that case, too, the content could become widely known all over Europe. Of course, many plays only had a local or regional impact, but some plays, especially by Dutch authors, had a tremendous influence. For instance, Guilielmus Gnapheus’s *Acolastus* (1529), with its theme of the Prodigal Son, and Cornelius Crocus’s *Joseph* (1535), featuring Joseph’s seduction by Potifar’s wife and his resisting her, were both played and printed all over Europe. 18 These editions could be single prints, but some plays were also included in collections of neo-Latin plays such as the *Comoediae ac Tragoediae aliquot ex novo et vetero testamento desumptae*, published in 1540 in Basle by Brylinger, that contained both *Acolastus* and *Joseph*, and the *Dramata sacra: comoediae atque tragoediae aliquot e Veteri Testamento desumptae*, published by Ioannes Oporinus, also in Basle, seven years later. 19 So the momentary effect of the performances could be followed by a long-term impact by the printed version, although buying and reading do not necessarily correspond, but many of the editions will have been bought by schoolmasters who wanted to perform or read these plays with their pupils. So whereas such an immediate effect as that of Bidermann’s *Cenodoxus* is spectacular and rare 20 — and that in a play that was printed not earlier than 1666 and therefore must have circulated in manuscript — plays or

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18 Crocus’s *Joseph* ran to some twenty editions until 1600, Gnapheus’s *Acolastus* over fifty before 1585.


20 There is, of course, another spectacular effect in the 1828 performance of Daniel François Auber’s opera *La Muette de Portici* in Brussels that triggered the Belgian Revolt of 1830.
clusters of plays will have had their impact, if any, under the motto *gutta cavat lapidem, non vi, sed saepe cadendo.*

Some of these plays also *cadebant* by translations, imitations and adaptations. Especially in the German countries, Latin plays by authors from the Netherlands were translated into the vernacular, so that a larger audience could become familiar with them. In some cases it took some time before the translation was made or published: Pieter Godewyck translated Schonaeus’s *Dyscoli* (1603) as *Witte-broots kinderen of bedorve jongelingen* (‘Children eating white bread or spoiled boys’) in 1641. Some dramas were imitated to make another drama. But either in translations or in creative imitations, the ideology of the original play may have been altered.

All this says something about the *possible* impact of the plays, not about the *actual* effects they had. And such reports as that on Bidermann’s play are very rare. Most remarks that have survived tell us that some play was performed with some success, or that it was performed a few times or often. Or we can learn from the town accounts or municipal archives that a performance had taken place, because the city magistrate presented the players with wine or beer. In some cases we can read that pupils of the Latin school of city X went to city Y to perform a play. So the famous dramatist Macropedius took some of his pupils from Utrecht to the small town of Gouda, at some forty kilometres distance, to play; the rector and pupils from Zwolle did the same in Kampen, but they had to travel only fifteen kilometres.

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21 A medieval variant of *Epistulae ex Ponto* IV.10.5; cf. *Ars amatoria* I.475–76.


24 And even that report is questionable; see Hess, ‘*Spektator – Lector – Actor*’ (n. 1).

25 Jacobus Cornelius Lumnemane a Marca writes in his dedication to Dionysius Villerius, attached to his *Amnon* (1617), that the performance moved the audience to tears, and even caused heartaches (ff. A2’’): ‘Multi hic in orchaestra exhibitum lacrymas elicuit, cordolum provocavit, considerantibus dubias Regum vices, *Amnonis* furias, et *Thamarae* luctum veluti in pergula spectantibus, quam impius frater violento incaestu oppressit.’

26 P.N.M. Bot, *Humanisme en onderwijs in Nederland*, Utrecht, etc.: Het Spectrum, 1955 p. 130–31; H.W. Fortgens, *De Latijnse school te Kampen*, [Deventer], 1956 (Verslagen en mededelingen
dramatic texts could happen through performances, directed by the author himself or by others in other cities, or through printed versions, translations and adaptations.

Reactions to plays and performances

We know that contemporaries thought theatre had its own specific influence. We know that, for instance, from the measures the magistrates took after the rhetoricians’ feast in Ghent in 1539. For they were afraid that many of the plays — in the vernacular — that were staged and — even worse! — printed would spread the reformist ideas contained in them, written as they were on the controversial theme of what is man’s consolation at the hour of his death. This could only cause problems, since the answer was a shibboleth for orthodoxy: was it the Church, the clergy and the sacraments, the Roman Catholic point of view, or God’s grace through Jesus Christ, the more Protestant faith? Many chambers abstained from making the orthodox choice. So the government put the edition of the plays on the Index librorum prohibitorum. In 1546 and 1547 Jacob van Middeldonck, leader of the Antwerp rhetoricians, and the Antwerp schoolmaster Peter Schuddematte were even sentenced to death after they had been convicted of heresy in their plays. Also in other provinces, especially in Zeeland, measures were taken against the rhetoricians and their public performances.

Conversely, the authors too for their part thought their plays would have some influence. That is the reason why some of the authors had some of their plays, both in the vernacular and in Latin, printed as pamphlets. These broadsheets, leaflets or small booklets, which also included prose writings, songs and verses, were meant to influence ‘public opinion’. Often the authors revealed in the titles or subtitles of their plays what their intentions were. 

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29 Meertens, Letterkundig leven in Zeeland (n. 8), pp. 72–75.


31 Theatre is ignored in De Kruif, Meijer Drees And Salman, Het lange leven van het pamflet.
were, as in *tragoedia christiana nova* (Levinus Brechtus, *Euripus*, 1549) to indicate its ‘Christian’ (in the case of Brechtus: Roman Catholic) character, or in *tragoedia alia nova Mercator, seu iudicium in qua in conspectum ponuntur apostolica et papistica doctrina* (Thomas Naogeorgus, *Mercator*, 1540), so that the audience might form an opinion on Roman Catholic doctrine. Another play by Naogeorgus, *Hamanus* (1543), indicates by its subtitle that it censures false accusations and tyranny, and urges the audience to lead a good life and to fear God: *reprehendens calumnias et tyrannidem potentum et bortans ad vitae probitatem et metum Dei*. They were convinced that drama, just like philosophy, was able to contribute to the improvement of the public’s and the pupils’ morals.32 Therefore they often incorporated into their prefaces and letters of dedication the Ciceroian phrase that comedy is ‘a mirror of custom, an image of truth’ and other remarks pertaining to private morals or to the Horatian concept adopted by the fourth-century commentator of Terence, Donatus, that in comedy ‘one learns what is useful in life and, what, conversely, ought to be avoided’.33

**Impact, reception and public opinion**

When discussing both intended and ‘real’ impact or reception it is necessary to ask what we mean by ‘impact’ or ‘influence’. We may distinguish several levels. Is it a thorough or moderate attempt at influencing public life, an imposing of moral standards on individuals, or is its aim an internalisation of these standards to alter people’s conscience, whatever ‘conscience’ may be exactly? Or does one mean to inspire people to action? Of course it is also quite conceivable that the different ‘levels’ operate at the same time. For the moment I confine myself to the concept of ‘impact’ as the process of transmission of some moral, political, theological or philosophical values to the audience or readership in such a way that they may get acquainted with them and perhaps internalise them and reproduce them during their own life. It is argued that when writing the so-called ‘Orange plays’ the authors had their intended audience in mind and that these premises and the content of their dramas mutually influenced each other, and that their tragedies were not only literary, but also socially ‘encoded’.34

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32 See, e.g., Jacobus Zovitius’s letter of dedication to Guilielmus Zagarus, pensionary of Zierikzee, added to his *Ruth* (1533), f. A2r.
33 Donatus, *Commentum Terenti* V.1: ‘[…] imitationem vitae, speculum consuetudinis, imaginem veritatis’ and ‘quid sit in vita utile, quid contra evitandum’.
That is for the writing and production of plays, i.e. the intended impact. Reception studies make it clear that it is not only necessary to describe the intended impact or the results of reception in terms of the ‘influence’ of some author on another, but also the process of reception.³⁵ How is the (literary or other) work received? What is altered, adapted, appropriated, transformed, etc.? Then the focus shifts from the author to the reading and viewing audience. But the reception of the reading audience is directed by all kinds of paratextual means: the title, a preface or letter of dedication, preliminary poems, prologue, epilogue, and even by the shape and format of the booklet in which the play is presented,³⁶ while in theatrical performances it is the stage props, the acting, the theatrical environment as well as the performed text that in some way influence the audience’s perception. In such a setting the prologue and epilogue that actually were spoken play a role, while the other paratexts are absent.

Therefore one must always keep in mind that drama in itself is performance and that a theatre text actually is like a musical score. The text is the basis that the director and the actors have to execute or perform. They have to put in phrasings, accents, pauses, and so give the play, like a piece of music, its interpretation.³⁷ So we can analyse the play as a text, for instance regarding the rhetorical or dramaturgical means by which it tries to impose some idea on the readers or the audiences, or look at the paratexts, for instance the stage directions, by which the authors want to influence the interpretation of their plays, and that is all we can do, but, again, we must not forget that drama is performance and the text is like a ‘theatrical score’. The staging of a play will give the audience another reception than their reading of it, and several productions of a play will differ and even stress different aspects or even alter the moral lessons or ideology that the author wanted to get across to the audience.

We also have to define ‘public opinion’. Most theories concerning this phenomenon reckon with political issues. There is a short and helpful definition of public opinion which reads:

³⁷ On this topic there is a vast amount of literature available. A nice introduction is C. Balme, Einführung in die Theaterwissenschaft, Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2003³.
...public opinion is a complex of similar utterances of larger or smaller segments of society concerning public affairs, at times spontaneous, at times artfully manipulated, expressed in a multitude of ways, which statesmen must take into account.38

This raises many questions about the possibility of determining public opinion or public opinions, and how these opinions were ‘influenced’. This being the case, it is difficult to determine to which social classes these opinions pertained. If there is any written communication, be it in the vernacular or in Latin, this implies some literacy. This implies that the pamphlets always voice the opinion of burghers and other upper classes, so in our endeavour to define ‘public opinion’ we must narrow the notion to the ‘public sphere of civil society’.39 The theory of public opinion, founded by Jürgen Habermas and applied to early modern society by, for example, Wohlfeil,40 confines itself to politics, while in my opinion religion, in the sense of the personal and social perception and representation of the tenets of Christian faith, should be included too. And this opinion was ‘spread’ and ‘influenced’ by pamphlets, songs, prints and other visual and auditive media, discussions in the inns, sermons, and theatre. In other words, one can distinguish ‘informal publicity’, what may be called ‘the talk of the town’, ‘gossip’, discussion, and ‘formal publicity’, media that intentionally are used to direct public opinion, in which formal media may interfere in the informal discussion.

38 Femke Deen, after H. Oncken, Historisch-Politische Aufsätze und Reden, München and Berlin: R. Oldenbourg, 1914: ‘[…] public opinion is a complex of similar utterances of larger or smaller segments of society concerning public affairs; at times spontaneous, at times artfully manipulated; expressed in a multitude of ways, in clubs, assemblies, above all in the press and in journals, or perhaps the unspoken feelings of each one of us; of the common man in the street or of a small circle of cultured; here a true power factor, which statesmen must take into account, or something of no political significance; something again to be evaluated differently in every country; sometimes united, rising up like a tidal wave against the government and the experts, sometimes divided, concealing conflicting tendencies; at one time bringing out the simple and natural sentiments in people, at another time being the rowdy manifestations of wild instincts; always leading and always being led; looked down upon the sophisticated, yet forcing the hands of men […].’


The impact of drama

Now we have discussed the possibilities of theatre to influence public opinion, the influence itself and public opinion, as well as the opportunities or dangers that the authors or the government saw in theatre’s influencing of public opinion, it is time to look at actual influence. We cannot give hard proof of that, for theatre in some way and to a certain extent has to follow mainstream opinions to be appreciated. Moreover, in the early modern period drama is only one of the media that tries to have some impact on society, next to, as has been stated already, sermons and informal exchanges of opinion. And that influence is meant to be mainly on personal morals, in urging adherence to virtue and the avoidance of vice. That is, as far as biblical or religious drama is concerned. In historical and political drama things may be different.41

But dogmatic religious topics were also on the authors’ minds. Georgius Macropedius, for instance, printed his famous *Hecastus* in 1539 — the same year as the rhetoricians’ feast in Ghent — on the consolation of man in the hour of death, the *Everyman*-theme — the very same theme as the Ghent contest. Its subtitle runs: ‘A play that is both pious and pleasant, in which every mortal who is a sinner and is taken by surprise by a sudden death can see as in a mirror how he through Christ can die a blessed, and even a cheerful death, after he has truly repented his sins.’42 This title makes clear that Macropedius’s aim was not only to treat the topic of grace in a theological manner, but also and mainly to induce the audience — and the pupil actors! — to practise piety. But he feared being misunderstood. In the edition of his *Opera omnia* of 1552 he defended himself against certain accusations that he had deviated from the tenets of the Roman Catholic Church by showing a repentant sinner who could be saved by faith and Christ only, and did not need penitence, confession or other sacraments of the Church. Frank Leys has convincingly argued that this defence by Macropedius has to do with the troubles concerning the Ghent performances. Both here and in Macropedius’s play, public theology and personal religion meet. The question is still whether he and the Ghent rhetoricians directed public opinion or just followed it.

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41 See the contribution by Juliette A. Groenland.
As a consequence, this type of consideration also does not bring us further toward answering the question what actual influence (biblical) drama had. Another approach could be to look at the careers of the players. In at least two instances we have a list of the schoolboys who staged the fabula. Cornelius Crocus’s *Ioseph* (1536) with a list of the Amsterdam pupils who belonged to the aristocracy and citizenry, and of Laurimanus’s *Esthera regina* (1562), which lists Utrecht schoolboys. But it is unfortunate for our topic that none of these pupils became an author himself nor are there other means by which we can get to know their opinions in later life, nor even do we know of good Christian measures they took in matters of public interest, nor do we learn anything about their lasting ‘faithful charity’ or their ‘innate piety’, for instance, such as we saw in the case of Biderman’s play. In the case of the 1595 Zeeland performance, we know the names of the students who wanted to stage three plays from Antiquity. Although Vondel in his early years saw some Latin play performed in Utrecht, no direct influence of Latin school drama can be traced in his tragedies, only an indirect impact, as Parente has shown. But then the question is whether this ‘influence’ was a result of seeing or reading drama. And again, what is ‘influence’ in his case? It must be noted, however, that Vondel translated two tragedies by Grotius, the *Adamus exul* (‘Adam in Exile’, 1601) and *Sophompaneas* (‘Joseph’, 1635) into *Adam in Ballingschap* (‘Adam in Exile’, 1665) and *Sofompaneas* (1635). It is of course also possible that drama influenced the people’s view of life and society in general and that it indirectly and gradually changed the way they dealt with topical matters.

43 In the case of Laurimanus’s play, some of the pupils can be traced in the matriculation rolls of Louvain University, as Hans van de Venne once did.

44 Meertens, *Letterkundig leven in Zeeland* (n. 8), p. 73. The Leiden students referred to here were born in Zeeland: Jeremias van Dale, who studied medicine, Simon Schotte (law), Jacob Miggrode, (theology), Jonas van Reigersberch (theology), Mathias Looper (law), Apollonius Schotte (law), Sebastiaen Collaertsen (law), Josias van Vosbergen (law), Abraham Isacq (theology), Johan Fernando Visscher (law).

That leads to another approach, viz. to look at society in general. Has it changed after decades of neo-Latin moralising drama? As a matter of fact this question is very complicated for several reasons. First there are epistemological difficulties, for we know about society from all kinds of documents, including the dramatic works themselves, and we reconstruct or even create a society from these.\textsuperscript{46} It is, to put it in terms of New Historicism, not possible to get a ‘true to life’ picture of society. We can only form our image of it. And we do that also on the basis of dramatic texts, so there is always the danger of using circular reasoning. But even if it were possible to reconstruct, for example, early modern society at the beginning, the middle and the end of the sixteenth century, we have the eternal problem of \textit{post quod ergo propter quod}. Is then drama the changing agent, or one of those factors, or does it merely follow trends? Did it change society’s morality? And if it did not, there is always a solution. For we have the psychological or even theological problem of man’s fundamental wickedness according to Calvinist theologians, who based themselves on, for instance, Paul’s letter to the Romans, ch. 7: ‘not what I would, that do I practise; but what I hate, that I do.’ This does not mean that, as Parente stated it, Calvinist theologians did not see the possibility and the desirability of \textit{trying} to become a better individual, but only that they saw the difficulties in actually becoming one.\textsuperscript{47} These difficulties may still confront us nowadays: centuries of Christian preaching have not changed Western society into a purely Christian world in which all love their neighbours. How can we expect that from early modern drama? We could say that drama often presented the somewhat tolerant ideas of Desiderius Erasmus, and that the early modern Netherlands, too, gradually became relatively tolerant and ‘Erasmian’,\textsuperscript{48} but this in itself does not mean that drama was the effective cause, let alone the only one. What was, for instance, the impact of sermons in the Early Modern Period? Sermons, held by the preachers who in their youth had attended the Latin school and may have been influenced by the dramas they read, must have had some effect, or was it already true then that a good sermon is like good rain: most of it falls besides you? Or was it in this respect, too, that \textit{gutta cavat lapidem}? In this context drama, which is a multimedia genre, could be more impressive and effective: Jesuit theatre in particular can be regarded as a forerunner of


\textsuperscript{47} Parente, \textit{Religious drama and the humanist tradition}, for example. p. 86; cf. the review by C.G. Nauert, Jr in: \textit{The American Historical Review} 95 (1990), p. 811.

modern mass media.\textsuperscript{49} And when speaking about theatre we may also add that we have the Royal Entries, in which the monarch could reach and impress all the inhabitants of a city, not just the literate part.\textsuperscript{50}

\section*{Conclusions}

It is not easy to assess the impact of literature, or more specifically drama, on public opinion. Epistemological problems arise, as well as practical ones. How can we know anything for sure about Early Modern society, or how do we know that we are not merely working with our own construction of it? Even if that were possible and if it were also possible to assess the changes in that society, it is difficult to see the exact role of drama in that changes. Drama mainly follows mainstream opinion, instead of holding an opposite view. One could give as a counter-argument that rhetoricians’ drama at an early stage expressed heretical, reformatory ideas. That may be true, but in this case it followed a strong tendency within society. From whichever angle we look at the issue — that of the authors and their intentions, that of the public and their expectations and competence, that of the governments and their fears, and that of society and changes therein, from all points of view, it is clear that drama has some impact, but to assess how far this impact reached or how long-lasting it was, is another question. It is even questionable what public opinion and ‘impact’ or ‘influence’ are.

What about the report of the production of \textit{Cenodoxus}? It was written down sixty years later, in the posthumous edition of Bidermann’s dramatic works. The public is so clearly distinguished, the upper classes bewailing the sins on the one hand, and the lower classes laughing about them on the other, that even this report sounds too good to be true.\textsuperscript{51}


\textsuperscript{51} See Hess, ‘Spectator – Lector – Actor’ (n. 1). I wish to thank Gerard Huijing who was so kind as to correct my English.
Appendix: The relevant passage of the Preface to the *Ludi theatrales* (1666)\(^{52}\)

**Text**

Nec est silentio praetereundum hoc loco, fuisse a non nemine animadversum, ex P. Bidermanni *Comoediis* eas, quae maxime erant ioculares et hilaritatis quamplurimum continebant, fructu prae aliis fuisse uberrimas. Pro comperto habetur, *Cenodoxum*, quo vix ulla harum Actionum Comicarum laetiore cachinno Orchestram omnem concusserat, ut tantum non risu subsellia fregerit, tantos nihilominus in Audientium animis motus verae pietatis concitasse, ut quod centenae Conciones vix potuissent, paucae horae huic spectaculo datae confecerint; quando ex praecipuis proceribus Aulae Bavariae, urbisque istius Monacensis, viri omnino quatuordecim, saluberrimo *Dei* timore, factura hominum tam stricte discutientis, perculsi, non multo post finitum ludum, ad nos in Ascesin Ignatianam secessere, mirabili in plerisque morum mutatione secura. Diceres totidem Brunones iterum in maioris Carthusiae montes commigrasse, ut salutem tot periculis obnoxiam extra discrimen ponerent, planeque in tuto collocarent. Nimirum horrorem quondam inusitaturn his heroibus incusserat.

Panurgus, malus, et seductor *Cenodoxi* genius, qui cum coram Christo Iudice in omnem praeteritam vitam sui clientis, heu nimiunm obsequentis, vehementissime perorasset, Moresque miseri nullo non genere Superbiae contaminatos et undequaque sordentes omni artificio disertissimi Oratoris exagitasset, in maximo numero Spectatorum perpauci fuere, qui non totis artubus contremiscerent, plerisque perinde trepidantibus, ac si non alterius cuiuspiam pridem vita functi, sed sua ipsorum causa in illo terribili tribunal sub aequissimi Iudicis trutina laboraret, iustaeque damnationis fulmen non minus suo, quam *Cenodoxi* miserabilis capiti iamiam impenderet.

Inter hos Ascetas fuit is ipse, qui et *Cenodoxi* personam praecclare egerat, quique non longe post Ascesim, cum se in Societatem nostram recepisset, in ea pluribus annis adeo innocenter ac sancte vixit, ut dubitari non debat, quin inter beatos Coelites, aeternum victurum, nunc deget, tanto felicior illo damnato Doctore, quanto remotior ab ipsius vanitate et iactantia fuit, vir cum in omni virtute, tum in animi potissimum demissione, totiusque vitae modestia numeris omnibus absolutus.

Translation

We should not pass over in silence that everybody noticed that those comedies of Father Bidermann’s that were the most jocular and humorous to the utmost degree were the richest, above the others. Certainly the *Cenodoxus*, the play compared to which hardly any of these comic performances had made the whole theatre shake with so much laughter that the seats almost disintegrated, had nevertheless in the Audience’s minds roused so much real piety, that what a hundred Sermons hardly could have achieved was done in the few hours dedicated to this spectacle. For fourteen men in all among the most important dignitaries from the Bavarian Court and from that notable city of Munich, struck by a most salutary fear of God, Who investigates men’s deeds so strictly, not long after the end of the play went into retreat with us for the Ignatian Ascesis (Spiritual Exercises) and in most of them a miraculous moral change resulted from it. One could say that as many Brunos had moved again to the high Carthusian mountains to put their salvation, exposed as it was to so many perils, out of danger and bring it completely to safety. Clearly the play had produced a hitherto unknown horror in these heroes.

After the evil Panurgus, the seducing genius of *Cenodoxus*, had spoken before Jesus the Judge a passionate peroration on all the past life of his client who was, alas! too obedient, and had reproved with all the skills and tricks of an orator the morals of the wretched man for being polluted with every kind of Pride and in all ways tainted, there were very few persons among the Spectators who were not quaking from head to foot. Most were trembling just as if not the fate of someone else who had died long ago were at stake, but as if it concerned their own cause in that terrifying Judgment under the balance of the most righteous Judge and as if the lightning of the just sentence was no less threatening to strike their own heads than that of the wretched *Cenodoxus*.

Among those Ascetics was the very man who had played the role of *Cenodoxus* and who not long after the Ascesis, after he had entered our Society, led such an innocent and saintly life there, that without doubt he is now among the blessed saints in everlasting life. He was so much happier than that condemned Doctor inasmuch as he was more removed from his vanity and ostentation, a man who was not only perfect in all virtue, but especially in meekness of mind, and in the modesty of all his way of life.