An eloquent enigma: the dramas of Jacobus Cornelius Lummenaeus à Marca (c. 1580 - c. 1628) and their contexts
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Flanders, early seventeenth century. The Catholic attempt to suppress Protestant fervor had resulted in a full-frontal Counter-Reformation, led by the religious politics of the Archdukes Albert and Isabelle. Those who did not embrace the Catholic offensive, had for the most part fled, or were at least keeping a low-profile. Those who shared the Archdukes’ enthusiasm, among them many gifted literates of the day, actively joined the offensive. Religious essays, political pamphlets and educational treatises served in the ranks alongside philosophical theses, poetry and drama. Perhaps especially drama: was there a better way to reach and teach the ordinary people? Thus, a play on the religious disobedience of the Jews in ancient Jerusalem mirrored the sinful rebellion of the Northern Protestants – and, of course, their subsequent punishment. A play on that fatal vow of Jephthah, who sacrificed his only child to God, illustrated the Calvinists’ errant fanaticism. How could it not?

Such, at least, has been James Parente’s interpretational point of departure in the 1980s. The contextual interpretation of a number of exceptional Neolatin tragedies by the Ghent Benedictine monk Jacobus Cornelius Lumnænaeus à Marca (c. 1580 - c. 1628) he considered to be something that could be easily passed up on in such general terms, in order to move on quickly to any further questions that might arise with regard to these plays. Without any substantiation, thematic aspects were linked to specific contextual circumstances: thus, Parente also states that Lumnænaeus’ play on the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus served to raise funds for the author’s impoverished Benedictine abbey in Ghent. And the scholar could easily have extended his interpretational efforts, had he wished to do so. He might as well have recalled the fervent Catholic persecution of witches up to 1615: surely, Lumnænaeus’ Saul, which staged a necromancer and a ghostly apparition, might have been directed against such perilous heresies.

It is clear why such an approach can be tempting. The major Biblical themes deployed by Lumnænaeus could indeed easily be used to press home one’s argument on polemically charged subjects. Yet these very same Biblical themes were not only used to serve the Catholic cause: Protestants in fact employed the very same Jewish parallel to illustrate their own

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2 Cloet, ‘De gevolgen van de scheiding der Nederlanden’, 73.
position as God’s chosen people; the very same Jephthah-theme to highlight the military successes of the Northern Provinces, or to criticize the Catholic position on vows, celibacy in particular. But this wide-ranging diversity in interpretational possibilities in itself already suggests that any claim on the topical use of such themes requires thorough substantiation. Parente, however, dispensed with such an analysis, since he essentially needed these contextual parameters as one of the solid foundations for his discussion on Lummenaeus’ supposed paganization of Biblical tragedy. He first of all needed Cornelius’ drama to be essentially counter-Protestant, which could highlight even more the unwished-for side-effect of paganization that Parente claimed to have discovered. But whatever the necessity, the critical scholar is not released from his obligation to at least provide a basic substantiation to his claims. The question, though, is how.

Lummenaeus à Marca and his oeuvre

Cornelius de Marcke, or van Lummene alias van Marcke, was a Benedictine monastic at St. Peter’s abbey on the mons Blandinius in Ghent, and an internationally renowned humanist. Born in the Southern Netherlands in the final quarter of the sixteenth century, he went to school probably in Ghent and Douai. In the late sixteenth century, he joined the Capuchins, but soon transferred to the Order of St. Benedict in 1600. From 1608 onwards, Lummenaeus – who published exclusively in Latin – made a name for himself as author of Biblical tragedies and as an orator, publishing his works in Ghent, Louvain and Antwerp. Through the network of the Louvain professor Erycius Puteanus (1574-1646), the Ghent Benedictine managed to obtain patronage from some of the most illustrious men of his age, like Archduke Albert of Austria (1559-1621) and the Milanese cardinal Federico Borromeo (1564-1631). Almost constantly troubled by a weak health, the much-desired culmination of this process – his journey to Italy in 1622-1625 – caused him to run into serious problems with his abbot, Arsenius Schayck (1565-1631), who proved unwilling to assist his monastic financially abroad. Through the intervention of cardinal Francesco Barberini (1597-1679) and

3 Cf. with regard to such a topical use of Old Testament narrative by Dutch Protestants e.g. Porteman and Smits-Veldt, Een nieuw vaderland voor de muzen, 71-72; 232; Decavele, Gent. Apologie, 403 (cf. also below, p. 160-161); for the Jephthah-theme and monastic vows (of celibacy), cf. below, pp. 177 and 181-182 (with respect to Buchanan’s Iephthes).
4 By inattentively creating a mishmash of Christian and Stoic elements, Lummenaeus would have paganized Christian tragedy. I have refuted Parente’s argument on this supposed paganization in my paper at the 10th congress of the International Association of Neolatin Studies in Uppsala, 2009. See also Bloemendal, ‘Neo-latin Drama in the Netherlands: Paganization and Christianization’.
5 See chapter one for more in-depth biographical details.
his uncle, Pope Urban VIII (Maffeo Barberini; 1568-1644), Lummenaeus was able to return home in 1625. He died in Douai about 1628, and was buried there in the church of the English Benedictines. All the way through to 1628, Lummenaeus remained active as a man of letters. He tirelessly published many tragedies and (collections of) homilies, even while in Italy. Upon his return in 1625, he continued his work and gave to light new homilies and reworked versions of his tragedies with printers in Louvain and Douai. The relationship with his abbot would remain tensed until the end.

His published oeuvre, as noted above, consists mainly of Biblical tragedies and sermons. Though different the genres may essentially be, in Lummenaeus’ case they display two distinct similarities: a profound piety put on display through profuse eloquence, or, in short, religion and rhetoric. His tragedies, like many (Latin) tragedies of the early modern period modeled after the five-act dramas ascribed to the Roman Lucius Annaeus Seneca, can be labeled static, rhetorical, lyrical and devoid of action. Of his eight plays that have been given in print, all, bar one, take their subject from the Old Testament: Iephte (Antwerp: Hieronymus Verdussen, 1608) treats the gruesome story of the Israelite judge Jephthah (Judges 11), who vows to sacrifice to God whatever first comes out of his house to meet him upon his victorious return from battle. This turns out to be his daughter. His second play, Carcer Babylonius (Ghent: Gaultier Manilius, 1610) recounts the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonian king Nebukadnezzar, the subsequent blinding of the Jewish king Zedekiah and the killing of his sons (2 Kings). Lummenaeus’ Opera omnia (Louvain: Philip van Dormael, 1613) included both of these earlier plays in slightly reworked versions, as well as a third, Dives Epulo. This play, the only one based on the New Testament, stages the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus (Luke 16). In comparison to Lummenaeus’ other dramas, the Dives Epulo is not only exceptionally explicit in its moralizing outlook, but it also holds a special position in terms of the literary model employed. In 1615 Bustum Sodomae appears at the Ghent printing house of Cornelis vander Meeren, treating the destruction of Sodom (Genesis 19). Four more plays were to appear separately in print: the year 1617 saw Ammon (Ghent: Cornelis vander Meeren), a tragedy on Amnon, son of David, who rapes his half-sister Thamar and is put to death by his brother Absalom (2 Samuel 13). Saul, on the insanity of king Saul, his plot to murder David, and, finally, his death by his own hand (1 Samuel 11 – 2 Samuel 1), was published in Ghent in 1621 by Jan vanden Kerckhove. Abimelechus (Douai: Pierre Auroy) followed suit in 1622, when Lummenaeus passed through Douai on his way from Ghent to Italy. It stages the Biblical narrative of Judges 9: Abimelech, son of Gideon, slaughtering his seventy half-brothers in order to rule Israel, only to die soon afterwards at the hands of a woman. In 1625, the tragedy Sampson appeared at the publishing house of Henri van Haesten in Louvain. The play’s subject – Samson’s unfortunate fate at the hands of Delilah – had been taken from Judges 16. In 1628,
Lummenaeus republished all of his plays – *Dives Epulo* excepted – in the collection entitled *Musae lacrymantes* (Douai: Jean de Fampoux).6

These plays, then, constitute the dramatic corpus on which the research for this thesis has been based. I will, when applicable, sidestep briefly to Lummenaeus’ other publications, mainly *orationes* and *homiliae*, either published separately or in collections of some five to twelve speeches. The *Opera omnia* also contains a history in prose on the Dukes of Burgundy, a versified catalogue of St. Peter’s abbots up to 1613, several poetic lamentations (*Lessus*) and some occasional poetry. In 1628, he also published a *Diarium sanctorum*, a calendar of Saints with a iambic strophe dedicated to each.7

**Perspectives of value**

As a contribution to our understanding of the workings of (Neolatin) drama in the early modern arena of public opinion, the research for this thesis was initially geared towards answering the following questions: which auctorial intentions can be distilled from Lummenaeus àMarca’s tragic oeuvre, and how are these intentions presented to a (reading) audience? Also, what constituted the reception of his work, i.e. what was the result of the author’s efforts?

Reconstructing a playwright’s ‘intention’ is a notoriously hazardous undertaking, for an abundance of reasons.8 I will name a few. Often, more than one viewpoint can be distilled from a dramatic piece: how do we know which one, if any, of the views expressed is the author’s? And even when the author explicitly and publicly expresses an intention in for instance a preface, how can we be certain that there is no ‘hidden-agenda’ at work in his play, which is secretly forced upon the audience through different levels of interpretation, with an array of dramatic techniques? These basic questions already pose even further questions: there is, for example, no such thing as *the* audience. Thus, even if we are able to satisfactorily extract the author’s intentions, how do we know if the social groups or individuals that made up a (reading) audience were at all responsive to his message? Rather than leading to a proper answer, this approach would initiate a series of consecutive, rather unfounded hypotheses.

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6 In *Musae lacrymantes*, both *Carcer Babylonius* (now entitled *Sedecias*) and *Iephte* were thoroughly revised and abridged. The *Iephte* had also been published in 1624 in Rome (*Jacobus Mascardus*). It had, for the occasion, already been revised and abridged, and would only differ slightly from the edition to appear in 1628. See also appendix two.  
7 See appendix one for a bibliographical overview.  
8 Cf. the ‘intentional fallacy’, a term first coined by W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley in ‘The Intentional Fallacy’ (1946), reprinted in Wimsatt’s *The Verbal Icon* (1954), and central in New Criticism.
But what if, then, we were to look for ‘views’, or perspectives of value, expressed in his plays? If we could successfully connect these perspectives to certain contextual circumstances, would these results not significantly diminish the need for disclosing the auctorial intention? After all, an author, once he had released a play into the public domain, had no more control over its reception and could solely rely on the poetic tactics and guidance he had – consciously or unconsciously! – incorporated. This way, one would not be looking for the auctorial intention, but for (1) what a contemporary reader or audience could have distilled from a play, combined with (2) in which ways a text seems to guide this process. In short, by combining a text-based approach with possible reader-response reactions, a variety of perspectives may be distilled. These perspectives can in turn be confronted with specific contextual circumstances.

*From form and function to context: text-based approach and reader-response*

At first glance, Lumnenaeus left us only little material to work with. For one thing, the primary context of his activities as a playwright is yet unclear: did he write his plays for performance, and if so, for whom, by whom, where, when, how, etc.? But what is more, the author also refrained from providing explicit intentions and poetic statements – though we would still have to be on our guard, if he had, and an interpretational carte blanche is definitely not given. Therefore, if an audience was to read any (topical) contextual relevancy into Lumnenaeus’ drama, this would be first and foremost the result from an interaction with the primary text itself, under influence of various contexts. The approach, then, has to be text-based, working ourselves a way through the text, following the lines of the poetic and structural guidance that have the potential of ringing contextual bells with a (reading) audience.

In order to correctly assess Lumnenaeus’ tragic texts, I will first need to analyse his dramatic model and the formal techniques employed. This rather basic, literary assessment of Lumnenaeus’ tragedies (cf. chapter two) provides already an interesting challenge. Mostly classified as a fairly peculiar type of drama, characterized by a static and rhetorical appearance that supposedly did not lend itself for performance – Lumnenaeus’ tragedies consist for a large part of just monologues and choruses –, his dramatic model proved particularly vulnerable to misjudgment or to being brushed aside as insignificant. Indeed, in view of the lively appearance of sixteenth-century Latin school drama – mostly comedies –, Dutch rhetorician’s theatre, the popular Jesuit drama, as well as the grandeur of seventeenth-century tragedy which quite soon came to heed the classical precepts that were reintroduced in various poetics, Lumnenaeus’ work is rather atypical. But as an early and novel attempt to reintroduce classically-oriented Latin tragedy
in the Southern Netherlands, his work should be judged on its own merits, not by our own modern standards or the standards that were set by the masters of contemporary, but rather different literary models that eventually proved more influential and successful.

This retrospect criticism has already proven disastrous in the scholarly investigations of various types of early modern drama. Particularly in the case of French sixteenth-century tragedy – one of Lummeneaus’ main models, as I will argue in chapter two –, the imposition of standards set by seventeenth-century literary models made scholars blind to any details showing these works as belonging to an entirely different system. Sixteenth-century tragedians themselves surely did not knowingly work towards the ideal of French Classicism of the seventeenth century, so why judge their work along these lines? One can, of course, take note of such transitions in retrospect, but one does not do justice to earlier authors by holding them accountable for the transitional phase they eventually turned out to be representing, or to characterize them as mere precursors of what was to follow. The case of French tragedy is a clear warning not to be too hasty in our criticism of any literary model that does not fit into an anachronistically constructed framework. But that does not mean that an author can not be aware of any process of transition, of which Lummeneaus, in any case, will provide ample illustration.

Once we understand the concepts that form the basis of Lummeneaus’ dramatic form, we can continue our research onto the crossroads of form and function that may in turn provide an insight in the contextual aspects possibly involved. Since (especially when an author refrains from providing explicit suggestions) any given context can in my view only be activated through a reader’s perception of a play, I have adopted a reasoned approach based on the set of methodological ideas generally referred to as reader-response criticism.

In reader-response criticism, through an (individual) reader’s reception of any given text meaning is given to this text. More specifically, in this research, it is the individual reader – or a collective of readers/audience, to which I shall rather indiscriminately refer – that gives shape to any possible contextualization. Consequently, there can be no one right reading of a text – but that is not what we are after. The process is

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9 Cf. below, pp. 89ff.
10 An excellent introduction to the scholarly traditions that make up reader-response criticism is offered by Davis and Womack, Formalist Criticism and Reader-Response Theory. Slightly older, but still very useful is Freund, The Return of the Reader. For a selection of primary texts, from scholars like Wolfgang Iser, Norman Holland and Stanley Fish, the anthology edited by Jane P. Tompkins, Reader-Response Criticism. From Formalism to Post-Structuralism, is highly recommendable.
11 Fish, Is There a Text in This Class?, esp. 338-371.
indeed marked by a rather high degree of subjectivism, both on behalf of the researcher himself, and on behalf of the reconstruction he proposes of a contemporary reader's perception of a text. But the reader-response approach I suggest here is essentially inevitable, since no other means are available for getting from Lummenaeus' text to a context. Such an 'affective fallacy', as it has been called, involves the danger of leading the researcher too far away from the text, 'in all its solidity': but without a possibility of reconstructing the text's effects on its audience, this study, and what it aims at, would essentially be deprived of its only starting point.

How, then, could a contemporary (reading) audience's perception of a play have taken shape? In the case of Lummenaeus' tragedies, as I have argued above, the approach must necessarily be based on the primary texts, in absence of any other means such as suggestive prefaces, accounts of performances or other instances of reception, knowledge of the constitution of the (target) audience, etc. While some scholars of early modern drama have preferred to isolate certain acts, scenes, discussions or even individual verses in their search for the communication of a – or the author's – view on (topical) contextual issues, I will determine the different perspectives of value displayed by characters and choruses in single passages, and then weigh them within the play as a whole. It will turn out that some views, by their relative position, are more dominant than others. This approach of course yields different results than weighing individual perspectives as isolated events carrying equal weight. Ultimately, it attempts to identify which (balanced combination of) views prevail(s), or, in other words, which perspective of value the 'audience' is sent home with. Whether or not this prevailing outlook is the author's, is of no concern. What is important, is that the prevailing outlook can in turn be tested by specific contextual circumstances. Additionally, this method not only aims at showing the close connection between form and function in Lummenaeus' drama, but it will inevitably explore the limits of contextual interpretation as warranted by the actual text as well. As such, in this variation on reader-response criticism – itself already a vast area consisting of various approaches – the initial focal point of attention lies not with the reader, but with the moral and structural guidance presented by the text. This process will lead to one or more readings of the text that, though not necessarily correct or definitive, are in any case based on the outcome of a reasoned, text-based approach. Such a reconstruction may come as close as possible to an audience's perception of a play, at least when – as is the case with Lummenaeus' plays – more explicit accounts of reception have not come down to us. Whatever the results, it

12 Cf. Bleich, *Subjective Criticism*, who argues that the process of reading is always an interactive encounter between text and recipient (see Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 258 (s.v. 'Reader-Response Criticism')). Cf. also the conclusion to this thesis, pp. 213-214.
13 Wimsatt and Beardsley, ‘The Intentional Fallacy’ (1946), cf. above, p. 4nt8.
14 Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 42-43.
will in any case become clear that only a thorough understanding of Lumnenaes' literary techniques and the perspectives of value they support enables a successful attempt at constructing a contextual interpretation of his tragedies.

**Thesis structure**

This thesis can be divided into two main parts. Chapter one, a biographical presentation on Lumnenaes, constitutes the first part and will serve as a background against which the contexts of Lumnenaes’ literary production can be more distinctly highlighted. Though a biography of Jacobus Cornelius Lumnenaes à Marca was not the main focus of this thesis, it soon became clear that the prevalent biographical studies left much to be desired. Along the way, I have had the opportunity to re-examine not only known pieces of biographical information, but also some previously unknown items. When combining the results of this re-examination with the snippets of newly found material, a much fuller, sometimes even rather different image of our author’s life emerges. Still, I dare not say that this biographical presentation serves the interpretation of his plays – rather, the chapter presents an opportunity for a more thorough understanding of the historical position(s) of Lumnenaes’ tragic production. In turn, this pinpointed position might serve as one of the foundations on which the steps towards a contextualization of his dramas can be taken. The biographical chapter itself I have presented in disconnection with the analytical research of the second part and can therefore, if so desired, also be considered separately.

The second part consists of chapters two, three and four. Chapter two maps out the literary context of Lumnenaes’ dramatic model and aims to explain the seemingly unusual choices he made in constructing his tragedies the way he did. The chapter thus provides the formal basis on which the research can be carried from form to function in the remaining chapters, three and four, which constitute case studies that will analyse some of Lumnenaes’ plays along the methodological lines set out above, as well as highlight some of the techniques used by Lumnenaes to lead his model into a complex negotiation with different contexts. Along the way, we will come across certain aspects of Lumnenaes’ tragedies that possibly raise questions with regard to the concept of ‘Christian tragedy’. How can anything that is part of God’s Providence, which is necessarily aimed at one and the same joyful vanishing point called Redemption, actually be considered ‘tragic’? In the conclusion to this thesis, I will briefly sidestep to touch upon this complex discussion by assessing some basic elements that may throw some light upon Lumnenaes’ thoughts on the issue.
Limitations

Due to restrictions in time, many aspects of Lummenaeus’ tragedies and possible interpretational contexts have been left untouched. First of all, I have not been able to subject all of his dramas to equally detailed study. Similar case studies – for a wide variety of contexts – could be initiated for the tragedies that I have unfortunately been unable to pay more attention to. Even the reworked versions of his tragedies in subsequent editions deserve such in-depth attention, properly aligned with the various contexts that are then applicable. In the paper I delivered at the IANLS congress of 2009 in Uppsala, I have briefly demonstrated that Lummenaeus did not value aesthetics over matters of confessional purity, which also seems to hold true for the reworked versions: in the case of Carcer Babylonius and the 1628 edition, now titled Sedecias, the choices he made in rewriting his drama did not necessarily affect the delicate balance he had meticulously created between Stoic fatum and Christian Providence. It is possible that in other respects more radical changes may have occurred.

Also, our understanding of the rhetorical aspects of his drama could probably benefit from a thorough analysis of Lummenaeus’ work as an orator: he left us many orationes and homiliae, interspersed with Biblical themes, theatrical metaphors and rhetorical trickery. Surely his passion for rhetoric is a clear marker for the way he gave shape to his dramatic oeuvre, and an in-depth investigation – I have only partly and very selectively been able to include a discussion of some of his speeches – will definitely yield more interesting results.

Finally, I have focused mainly on the literary tradition of French humanist tragedy for demarcating Lummenaeus’ poetics, and sidestepped briefly to the Dutch vernacular tradition. This approach, of course, does not do justice to the complexity of the literary environment in which early modern Latin drama functioned. It would take a thorough analysis ranging from Latin and Greek drama of classical antiquity to the entire field of early modern drama, as well as many other literary genres, to gain a full understanding of the position that Lummenaeus’ work held in the field. And even then, many questions would probably still remain difficult to answer.

Bibliographical data

The bibliography of Lummenaeus’ published works (and some manuscripts) drawn up in Vanderhaeghen’s Bibliotheca Belgica is highly accurate and nearly

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15 Cf. above, p. 2nt4.
16 As has been argued by James Parente, ‘The Paganization of Biblical Tragedy’, 235.
complete. I have therefore provided only a concise bibliographical overview in appendix one, which also lists some editions and manuscripts that are not included in the *Bibliotheca Belgica*. Appendix two provides a synoptic overview of the contents of each play.

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