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Windows on the stage: some examples of the use of imagined spaces for religious and moral images on the Rhetoricians stage.

Introduction

The theatrical culture of the Low Countries in the fifteenth- and sixteenth century was chiefly conducted in public spaces: theatrical manifestations frequently formed part of civic and religious processions and the Chambers of Rhetoric performed their plays mainly outdoors, preferably central market squares.¹ There were exceptions: liturgical drama was performed in Church and there must have been dramatic entertainment in private houses and at noble or ducal courts. The majority of the large corpus of surviving plays, however, whether meant for special occasions such as Feast and Holy Days or for competitions, would seem to have been performed outdoors.

In the changing religious and cultural climate of the later sixteenth century Chambers of Rhetoric encountered resistance not only from secular and ecclesiastical Catholic authorities who judged them to have been instrumental in spreading and facilitating religious dissidence, but also from Calvinist Church Councils who saw them as amateur-competitors in the spreading of the Word of God. The literary and cultural climate too changed: the collectivity of the Rhetoricians Chamber made way for individual literary production, publicly performed plays gradually became less frequent.²

¹ In 1589 the town council of Haarlem wanted to relocate a Rhetoricians' performance from the central Grote Markt to another location not far away, ostensibly because of practical considerations. There were, however, underlying tensions, partly caused by Calvinist animosity against drama. That the Rhetoricians then retaliated by refusing to perform altogether, shows that they were fairly confident with regard to their position in, and importance to, the town. See Bart Ramakers, 'Voor stad en stadgenoten. Rederijkers, kamers en toneel in Haarlem in de tweede helft van de zestiende eeuw', in Bart Ramakers (ed.), *Conformisten en rebellen. Rederijkerscultuur in de Nederlanden (1400-1650)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003), pp. 109-126, 109-111.

² As with much of Rhetoricians history, the situation differs from province to province and town to town and changes at different times. For the 'fate' of Rhetoricians Chambers in the South and the North, see Anne-Laure van Bruaene, 'Sociabiliteit en competitie. De sociaal-institutionele ontwikkeling van de rederijkerskamers in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden (1470-1650)' en Arjan van Dixhoorn, 'Burgers, branies en bullebozen. De sociaal-institutionele ontwikkeling van de rederijkerskamers in de Noordelijke Nederlanden (1470-1650)', in *Conformisten en rebellen* (2003), pp. 45-64 and 65-85 respectively. Two illuminating case studies of Rhetoricians activities in individual towns are Guido Marnef, 'Rederijkers en religieuze vernieuwing te Antwerpen in de tweede helft van de zestiende eeuw', in *Conformisten en rebellen* (2003), pp. 175-188 and Bart Ramakers et al., *Op de Hollandse Parnas. De Vlaardingse rederijkerswedstrijd van 1616* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2006). It is clear that, notwithstanding strictures and criticism from

Drama was less and less positioned in the public domain as the involvement of Rhetoricians in its production decreased after the first decades of the seventeenth century.³ The first public theatre in the Netherlands was opened in Amsterdam in 1638. Compared to Spain, or to England, an entertainment culture lodged in public theatres developed very late in the Low Countries.

This contribution focuses on the notion of 'theatre' in a different way, namely by addressing the way in which in a play the stage becomes a space in which, separate from the main action of the play, another theatrical action takes place, watched by the characters. In illustrations of stages the separate compartments are frequently shown.

My focus of interest within these structural devices is how they set about explaining, altering or furthering mankind's relationship with the divine, and therefore also with the community he lives in, or with himself. At the heart of my investigation is the question whether the culture of conveying knowledge, instilling devotion, giving consolation, doling out warnings or even punishment, which in Catholicism and its drama made use of images, was altered or lessened in drama which no longer took Catholic truths, and the methods by which they had been traditionally conveyed, for granted.

An indication of the imaginative ways in which a separate scenes can be used to explain and clarify aspects of the relationship between mankind and the divine we find, for instance, in Robert Lawet's two-part play of *De Verlooren Zoone* (The Prodigal Son) of 1583, there is a moment when the protagonist crosses the boundary between his reality and a different biblical reality. The Prodigal Son has joyfully accepted that for him too salvation and forgiveness is possible and instead of being 'an inconsolable sinner' he becomes 'well-constoled mankind' and asks what he can do to be a true Christian. His guide *SGheests Inspiratie* (Spiritual Inspiration) pushes aside a curtain and reveals a number of wretchedly poor, thin, ill, badly clothed people. The Prodigal Son goes to them and hands out bread, beer, clothing, bedding, takes off the shackles of some captives and then sends them to an inn. Whilst that action is taking place he addresses them so that the audience hears, as well as sees, what he is doing and they, too, witness action in two

various quarters, the Rhetoricians had several 'fresh starts': in the North in the last decades of the sixteenth-century when the provinces gradually gained independence of Spain; in the South and the North certainly during the Truce with Spain: see *Conformisten en rebellen* (2003), passim.

³ There are many differences, geographical and temporal, in the development, decline, revival or adaptation of Rhetoricians and their activities. In general one can say that poetry competitions continued to be organised but drama competitions in the South dwindled under the reign of the Archdukes Albert and Isabella and in the North after the end of the Twelve Year Truce (1609-1621), when such activities were taken over by the Jesuits in whose educational campaign schooldrama became an important genre. The Truce itself had facilitated a revival of Rhetoricians Chambers and an increase in the number and the scope of their activities. The largest Rhetoricians competition ever organised in the Northern Netherlands was held in Kethel in 1615, with 31 participating Chambers and the following year Vlaardingen held a competition with 15 Chambers: see *Op de Hollandse Parnas* (2006), pp. 20- 21.

different, but overlapping, places and times.⁴ Moreover, they see the beneficial, practical consequences of the spiritual transformation of the protagonist.⁵

A comparable, but not analogous, instance can be found in one of two survivors of a cycle of seven Joys of our Lady, the *Sevenste Bliscap van Onser Vrouwe* (The Seventh Joy of Our Lady) of 1448.⁶ From the scene of Mary's deathbed in the house at the foot of Mount Sion, the focus shifts to where St. John is preaching to the citizens of Ephesus. This could have been shown simultaneously on the forestage or in an elevated compartment (since the preaching scene would have needed some space): St. John is surrounded by listening burghers of Ephesus and is then whisked away on a cloud to be transported to the Mary's house. As this is happening, some citizens of Ephesus comment on his sermon and on his miraculous transportation and speculate about the significance of this miracle. The next scene is located outside Mary's house where St. John arrives. The audience is thus aware of two geographically and temporally dovetailing scenes which together convey the great honour in which Our Lady is held by her Son: God performs miracles to enable the apostles to come from the ends of the earth to be with her.⁷

An example of evoked simultaneity in a classical play occurs at a crucial moment in the doomed love affair of Dido and Aeneas, the start of the hunt (which will end in the cave scene where they consummate their love). The guard on the battlements of Carthage sings a dawn song about springtime lovers who, like all animals, 'will play in darkling places' in secret 'with their beloved other half'. He then, speaking, relates and comments, benevolently insinuating, upon the queen and the knight of Troy preparing to ride out with the hunt. Whether this was only reported or whether the departure of the hunt was enacted on stage, does not much matter: the audience is made aware of the perfectly natural reality of springtime love and the anticipated consummation of the doomed love of Dido and Aeneas.⁸

Parallel representations such as these can, as we saw, be positioned or imagined in a different geographical location or historical time. It can consist of a play in the play, of

⁴ The action thus moves from one episode from the New Testament into another: from the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15: 11-32, to Christ teaching his disciples in the days just before Pascha (Matthew 25: 31-46).

⁵ See below for a discussion of Lawet's play.

⁶ Of the seven plays only the first and the last have been preserved. They were not originally the product of a Rhetoricians Chamber but of the literary wing of the Great Guild of the Archers of Brussels from the 1440s onwards. One of the Brussels' Chambers of Rhetoric may have become involved and there are documents from the sixteenth century which make clear that on several occasions the producer was the literary leader, the *factor*, of one of the Brussels Chambers as well as the Town Poet and that several Chambers may have supplied actors or practical help. The *Bliscappen* are not Rhetoricians drama but Rhetoricians may have been involved in its conception and its later performances.

⁷ W.H. Beuken (ed.), *Die eerste bliscap van Maria en Die sevenste bliscap van Onser Vrouwe* (Culemborg: Tjeenk Willink/ Noorduijn, 1978), pp. 162-169.

⁸ K.Iwema (ed.), 'Cornelis van Ghistele. *Van Eneas en Dido*', in *Jaarboek De Fonteyne* 33 (1982-1983), pp. 103-243, pp.194-5, vss. 1168-1223.

the showing of *togen* (*tableaux* or *tableaux vivants*), and/or can involve narrators or expositors.⁹ Plays with classical, biblical, historical or timeless allegorical narratives all employ these devices. Some of the *togen* or *figueren* are static and without words, some static with words, some have action and movement and/or speech. The majority of them are self-contained in that there is no interaction with the other actors on the main stage, but there are exceptions, as we saw above.

As said above, the visual aids used in Catholic drama persisted in dissident drama, be it with variations. The validity of visual and plastic images as devotional aids were subject of discussion in late fifteenth but especially in the sixteenth century as the Catholic's Church's use of images comes increasingly to be seen as idol worship.¹⁰ Outbreaks of iconoclasm, whether instigated and approved by government, as in England, by church leaders, as in Basel and Strasbourg, or by rebellious dissenters, as in the Low Countries, are evidence of the vehemence with which idolatry in Catholic worship practices was condemned by Protestants of different hues.¹¹

There was, however, no clear consensus about the use of images as devotional aids. Generally, image worship was seen as idolatrous but the use of images as educational aids was seen as something potentially fruitful. Luther did not condemn the use of images and espoused strongly the staging of biblical material. The great number and variety of German Reformation plays, biblical, allegorical and religious-polemical

⁹ The verb *togen* means to show, to demonstrate, and the noun (*toog/togen*) is commonly used in drama, or in processions, to indicate something shown, either a picture, a board with text, a scene in a separate space or compartment, often revealed by drawing aside a curtain. Sometimes the figures are silent and unmoving or, rarer, they do interact with each other or they deliver a monologue. Instead of *toog/togen* the term *figuere(n)* is used for the same phenomenon and there are many instances where a prologue-speaker or an expositor will announce that what is going to be shown will be done *figuerlijck*, i.e. with the help of *tableaux* (*vivants*). There is often have more than one *toog* in a play and they do occur frequently, although at present I cannot give a percentage.

¹⁰ However, attitudes towards 'images' amongst Calvinists were not merely negative: the devotion accorded to 'images' may have been seen as superstition and a hindrance rather than a help in the relationship between mankind and the divine but the value of images as educational aids was acknowledged in some quarters. This complexity, and its dependence on time, place and the religious culture of individual communities, is illustrated convincingly in an account of religious practices in Haarlem: Henry Luttikhuisen, 'The Art of Devotion in Haarlem Before and After the Introduction of Calvinism,' in K. Maag and John D. Witvliet, *Worship in Medieval and Early Modern Europe. Change and Continuity in Religious Practice* (Notre Dame: University of N.D.Press, 2004), pp. 281-299.

¹¹ See: Carl C. Christensen, 'Patterns of Iconoclasm in the Early Reformation: Strasbourg and Basel', in Joseph Gutmann, *The Image and the World. Confrontations in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Missoula/Montana: Scholars Press, 1977), pp. 107-149 and W. S. Maltby, 'Iconoclasm and Politics in the Netherlands, 1566', in Gutmann (1977), pp.149-164.

plays, in the vernacular and in Latin, are ample testimony to this attitude.¹² In the Low Countries the same flowering of drama can be observed and it is interesting that even amongst Calvinists there were those who valued paintings of religious subjects in churches, not as objects of worship, not as in themselves worthy of veneration but as educational aids and in some cases as beneficial to creating a meditative atmosphere.¹³ It is only amongst the real hardliners, the Orthodox Calvinists, that one encounters wholesale rejection of images, of religious drama, eventually of drama and entertainment in general.

The hatred of the worship of false idols and the translation of that into image breaking occurred rather late in the Low Countries: the most extensive and vehement breaking of the images took place in 1566, starting in West Flanders and affecting other provinces thereafter.¹⁴ It took place particularly in areas which had come under the influence of Calvinist preachers.

Long before that, however, the Rhetoricians had come to be seen as potentially subversive in matters of religion, even though as a group they were extremely varied in their religious adherences and beliefs. Debate was an inherent part of the culture of the Rhetoricians and the authorities did not only disapprove of plays which were thought to be non-orthodox but also feared them in general: they were part of a well-connected, urban, literate, articulate group which had access to written or printed documents and books, in particular to vernacular translations of the bible or other religious texts, had trading connections with other parts of Europe, and they were apt to voice criticism of economic or political matters.

And, after sustaining censorship, criticism and persecution from the Imperial authorities and the Catholic Church from the 1520s onwards, Rhetoricians in the Republic found themselves under fire from the Calvinist Church in the later part of the sixteenth century. What the might of Habsburg and the one true Church had not achieved, was eventually effected with some success by a small, vociferous group of Protestants whose spiritual ancestors had greatly benefited in their advocacy of the new covenant from the Chambers of Rhetoric. The objections of the Calvinists were first directed against the staging of sacred and/or biblical topics on the stage and gradually came to include all manner of theatrical entertainment.¹⁵

¹² An old but still illuminating study about this subject is Hugo Holstein, *Die Reformation im Spiegelbilde der dramatischen Literatur des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Halle: Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 1886), in particular for Luther's attitude pp. 18-25, for biblical drama, pp. 75-159.

¹³ See note 8: Henry Luttikhuizen, 'The art of Devotion in Haarlem' (2004),

¹⁴ Two authoritative studies on this subject are Phyllis Mac Crew, *Iconoclasm in the Low Countries, 1544-1569* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); J. Decavele, *De dageraad van de reformatie in Vlaanderen* (Brussels: Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, 1975) 2 vols; See also R.W. Scribner, *Bilder und Bildersturm in Spätmittelalter und frühen Neuzeit* (Wiesbaden: Harassowitz, 1990).

¹⁵ Complaints about the Rhetoricians and especially against their drama performances were varied, ranging from the supposedly godless behaviour of Rhetoricians in general to a particular condemnation of representations and embodiments of God's Word and other sacred things on the stage: Th. C. J. van der Heijden, 'Rederijkers en Overheid', in F.

The role of the Chambers in criticising the Catholic Church is acknowledged by the playwright and historian P.C. Hooft (1581-1647) in his majestic account of the history of the Republic which relates the development of the Revolt against Spain and its political and religious causes. He was a member of a Rhetoricians Chamber which, however, by the time Hooft started writing, had become an institution which espoused the ideals of the renaissance. Hooft's own plays are modelled on classical tragedy but he would have known Rhetoricians plays at first hand: they continued to be performed into the 1620s. The manner in which he recalls this and specifically the publicly performed *heele persoonadje spelen* (full length plays with characters) gives the impression of a phenomenon located in the past:

“Een ouwde oeffening in meest alle Nederlandsche steeden, en veele dorpen was die van de rymkonst; waertoe de aardighste en blygeestighste vernuften hunne vergaaderinge hielden, op plaatsen hun by de wethouders verschaft, die Rhetorykkamers genoemt werden. Deeze waaren gewoon niet alleen verscheide gedichten uit te geeven, en van handt tot handt te laten loopen, maar zelfs in oopenbaare heele persoonadjen speelen te vertoonen, waar in zy, nu boertwys, dan met Ernst yeder ‘t geen zyn plicht betrof te gemoet voerden [...] Ende niemant wane met strooyen van schriften oft gedrukte boexkens op te mooghen teeghens de scharpheit van een gladde tong, die een groot getal teffens van allerley menschen, op een uurse belezen kan, en hun de hartstochten des woordtvoeders wel anders weet in te boezemen. De vryheit van monde dan deezer luiden ontzagh zich niet, daar ‘t pas gaf, (en ‘t gaf dikwyls pas) den paapen op hun zeer te tasten; en zoo wel de plumpe misbruycken te beschempen, als de bitterheit der vervolginge haatelyck voor te stellen.” [An old fashioned exercise in most Dutch towns, and in many villages, was that of the art of rhyming/poetry, for which the ablest and liveliest minds came together in meetings, in locations which the local counsellors provided for them, such gatherings were called Chambers of Rhetoric. These were not only accustomed to publish some poems and circulate them but in fact performed whole plays in public in which they, now in jest, then in earnest, showed where everyone's duties lay [...]. No one should think that the lavish distribution of written pamphlets or printed books could compete with the sharpness of a honed tongue which is able, in the space of one hour, to influence a great number and variety of people and impress upon them the passions expressed by the characters in a totally different manner. The freedom of speech of these actors did not refrain, where appropriate (and it often was appropriate) from criticising the Catholics so that it was driven home; and mock their blatant abuses as well as the bitterness engendered by their persecution.”]

Yet Hooft himself was a member of a Rhetoricians' Chamber in Amsterdam, *De Eglentier* (The Eglantine) as were other poets of the early seventeenth-century and Rhetoricians Chambers continued to organise drama competitions and to operate as

C.van Boheemen and Th. C. J.van der Heijden, *Met minnen versaemt. De Hollandse rederijkers vanaf de middeleeuwen tot het begin van de achttiende eeuw. Bronnen en bronnenstudies* (Delft; Eburon, 1999), pp. 123-175. This is not the place to enlarge upon the other reasons for the disappearance of Rhetoricians drama from the public domain but a number of cultural factors had an impact on this as well. See for this: *Conformisten en rebellen* (2006), pp 45-64.

poetry societies.¹⁶ Hooft, though not inspired by any religious objections to drama, had however an interest in reforming the literary activities of his Chamber and elevating its 'scholarly' status. Other voices were raised in support and in praise of the Rhetoricians. Hooft's assessment of the importance of the Chambers in the religious debates was accurate but his presentation of the Chambers as 'bygone' institutions cannot be taken at face value.

To Calvinists, however, laymen who wrote and performed plays with sacred or biblical subjects were anathema. Their objections were particularly aimed at representations of divine and/or biblical persons or notions (God the Father/Abraham/ the Holy Spirit) or *togen* and *tableaux vivants* showing such characters or notions. And yet, the combination of the verbal and the visual had been crucially functional, not only in Catholic but in dissident drama as well. Earlier reformers, such as Luther, had not singled out dramatic representations as reprehensible but saw instead some merit in them. Drama in the Low Countries demonstrates that Rhetoricians too deemed the exploitation of the visual representation of the sacred morally and educationally helpful. It is tempting to infer a causal relationship between the very strong (visual) dramatic tradition in the Low Countries and the very late advent of iconoclasm compared to the different (or less culturally integrated) urban drama traditions of places where early iconoclasm did occur with devastating effects, such as in Strasbourg, Zürich or Basel, or where such destruction became official policy, as in England.

Some examples of the continued employment of 'images' and *tableaux vivants* in drama which questioned or explicitly opposed traditional Catholic dogma will be discussed below.

Togen in Protestant plays

All the plays performed in Ghent for the 1539 competition had *togen* wherever they might be placed in the spectrum from orthodox to dissident.¹⁷ The Brussels contribution, which is decidedly critical of the Catholic Church, strengthens its message with a number of *togen* which do put divine characters on stage: God the Father speaks in the first *three* togen, Christ on the Cross speaks in the fourth *toog* and presses the arrow of sin into his body and in the sixth *toog* Christ rises and smites Death with his Cross, in the seventh Christ is shown triumphant with hell, death and sin underneath him.¹⁸

In the Edijnghhe play, Lutheran in its inspiration, the Resurrection is shown.¹⁹ Antwerp seems to adhere to the Lutheran doctrine of justification and three of its four *togen* show Christ, on the Cross, Triumphant and Risen.²⁰ The Nieuwerkerke play is not

¹⁶ *Nederlandtsche Histoorien* (Amsterdam, 1642), pp. 37-38 and W. Waterschoot, 'De rederijkerskamers en de doorbraak van de Reformatie in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden', in *Jaarboek de Fonteyne*, XLV-XLVI (1995-96), pp. 141-153, (141-2).

¹⁷ See for a detailed discussion of some of the Ghent plays D. Coigneau, 'De Evangelische Leeraer; "een spul vol heresien"', in *Jaarboek De Fonteyne* (1989-1990), 31-32, pp. 117-146.

¹⁸ See B.H. Ern  and L.M. van Dis, *De Gentse Spelen van 1539* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), 2 vols, vol.II, pp. 397-434.

¹⁹ *De Gentse Spelen*, vol. II, 569-596

²⁰ *De Gentse Spelen*, vol. I, pp. 269-302.

openly critical of the Catholic Church but has a noticeable emphasis on Christ as the bringer of consolation rather than retribution and on faith as a gift of God. It features an unusual *toog* which shows Christ on the Cross and a metal (copper) serpent which features as a symbol of Christ as a victor over the venom of sin.²¹

These examples are of course limited as evidence for the assumption that ‘images’ of the sacred and the divine continue to be used by Protestant authors. First of all, Luther’s, and the Lutheran, stance vis à vis drama and the depiction of the divine was not as outspoken and disapproving as that of other early Protestants and of the Calvinists later in the century.²² Secondly, the competition in Ghent shows how much the issues with regard to faith and worship were in the public domain; none of the Chambers participating were programmatically rebellious *in religio* at that time. The boundary between what was and what was not considered heretic was opaque for many people and it is clear that early ‘reformers’ were developing ideas that were *ab ovo* circulating in the late medieval Church. The playwrights presenting their work in Ghent were not theologians: they presented and developed ideas which were debated in the public domain.²³

There were, however, more consciously ‘rebellious’ plays. One such programmatically ‘heretic’ play (*een spel vul heresien*) was performed in 1543 on the estate of Johan Utenhove, a patrician Protestant whose dissident opinions came to adhere more to the Zwinglian than the Calvinist interpretation of faith.²⁴ He became a prominent

²¹ *De Gentse Spelen*, vol. I, pp. 177-204.

²² This is too elaborate an issue to be discussed in detail here. For Luther’s views on drama a few references may be helpful: Thomas I. Bacon, *Martin Luther and the drama* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1976). Bacon, p. 42-45, highlights the fact that Luther was in favour of religious plays in schools but wanted these to show events in the life of Christ rather than the passion. Not the suffering of Christ was important but the effect of that suffering: “*Die Passion hat nun sein werck getan und dich erschreckt*, in *Ein Sermon van der Betrachtung des Heijligen leydens Christi* (1519); Hugo Holstein, *Die Reformation im Spiegelbilde der dramatischen Litteratur des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Halle: Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 1886), pp. 19-25 where much the same idea is expressed. Melancthon too was in favour of ‘*die Darstellung des Auferstehens Christi und anderer wahrer Geschriften*’, see Holstein, *Die Reformation* (1886), p. 23.

²³ An admirably clear account of the doctrinal confusion reigning in these early years is that of Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation thought. An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1989), in particular pp. 1-26.

²⁴ That at least is the opinion of J. Decavele, ‘Jan Utenhove en de opvoering van het zinnespel te Roborst in 1543’ in *Jaarboek De Fonteyne XXXIX-XL* (1989-1990), pp. 101-116, 106-7, who points out that later in life Utenhove took issue with both the Lutheran and the Calvinist interpretation of the Last Supper and adhered to a Zwinglian, strongly symbolic, interpretation instead. Dirk Coigneau, ‘De Evangelische Leeraer: “een spul vol heresien”’, in *Jaarboek de Fonteyne XXXIX-XL* (1989-1990), pp. 117-145, stresses how many specifically Lutheran views and references are embedded in *DEL*. This may have been due to Joyeux’ views rather than those of Utenhove. Interesting in the present context is, however, that three of the five *togen* do not only show but also make their impact clear in dialogue or monologue and that all of them are either

leader in the communities of Protestant refugees, particularly of London's Austin Friars Church. It is likely that Utenhove's part in the writing of this play was rather smaller than had been thought and that the *de facto* author was one Gillis Joyeux from Oudenaarde, but the play was performed under his patronage.²⁵

The *Evangelische Leeraer* (The Evangelical Teacher) is full of criticism of Catholic dogma with regard to salvation and to the practices and means by which salvation was held to be possible. Dirk Coigneau has shown the Lutheran bias of this play: 'good works' and 'man's own merits' are not only denied any efficacy in obtaining salvation but condemned as sinful as well.²⁶ A few examples will need to suffice:

a. *Evangelische leeraer*

Totten Ephesien int tweede men claerlick siet:

Wt ghenaden es ons salicheyt commen,

Niet wt den wercken, dus wilt u verneren,

Op dat wij ons daer af niet en berommen;

Tes Gods gave, near Paulus declareren,

De rechtveerdighe sal sonder cessen

Wten gheloove leven sonder claghen (ll. 63-69)

[In the second 'Ephesians' one can clearly see:

our salvation is granted by mercy,

not through good works, so be humble,

that we may not boast of those;

as Paul declared, mercy is God's gift

and the just believer will without ceasing

live nourished by faith without complaining.]

b. *Evangelische leeraer*

Vermalendijt zijse die hem op meinschen betrauwen,

Naer Jeremia's ontfauwen, wilt dit onthauwen.

Oock seyt Gregorius: Alle dinck es wtghesteken

Dat men sonder discretie doet; dit hoort hem spreken

Want hy seyt dat al in sonden verkeert. (ll. 105-109)

introduced or explained in their symbolic-allegorical meaning by *Dienaer Gods* (God's Servant) and *De Evangelische leeraer* in response to *Ongheleert Volck's* questions. The audience's attention is asked for an 'extra' scene and the didactic strategy is to link what the spectators see and hear in these biblical scenes with their own here and now, and to explain every detail in the context of the question what are true and what are false *aflaten* (indulgences)'.

²⁵ Utenhove escaped to Germany in 1544, Joyeux was arrested in 1545. See for this J. Decavele, (1989-1990), pp. 107-109; Dirk Coigneau, 'De Evangelische Leeraer: "een spul vol heresien"', in *Jaarboek de Fonteyne XXXIX-XL* (1989-1990), pp. 117-145, 120-121. C.C. de Bruin, 'Een seer schoon Spel van zinnen ghemaect by mijn Heer Johan Wtenhove', in *Jaarboek de Fonteyne XXXIX-XL* (1989-1990), pp. 21-100, is a text edition of this play, introduced by J. Trapman.

²⁶ Coigneau (1989-90), *passim*.

[Cursed be those who put their trust in people,
as Jeremiah explains, do remember this.
And Gregory too says: all things are fruitless
If done without judgment; do listen to him,
For he says that all that turns into sin.]

c. *Evangelische leeraer*
Verdomt moet ghy sijn met uwen ghelde,
Dat ghy meent Gods gave (vergef der sonden)
Om ghelt te vercrighene, near Christus orconden;
Dus en weest doch daer toe niet ghenegen. (ll. 136-139)
[Damned you will be with your money
if you think that God's gift (forgiveness of sins)
can be obtained with money; Christ made that clear,
so don't be inclined to go that way.]

The *togen* in this play do show differences amongst themselves but all work together to convince the *dramatis personae*, and the audience, that Catholic methods and means to obtain salvation are invalid at best, and sinful at worst. Interestingly, the dramatic method of conveying this on the stage is to a large extent a continuation of the manner in which this had been, and continued to be, done in Catholic drama.

Toog I Figure. Jesus sittende aen den putte van Samarien (Jesus sitting by the well of Samaria.) The purpose of the *toog* is to explain that:

God wilt elcken sijn gracie schincken,
Want hij heefse ghepresenteert,
so hier figuerelick sal worden gedeclareert,
diese van hem niet hebben begheert. (ll. 152-155)
[God will give his Grace to everyone,
for he has granted it even to those,
-as will be shown here in a tableau-,
who had not desired it.]

The actual *toog* is not only a *tableau vivant* but '*parlant*'; it is staged, like the other *togen*, in a separate compartment with curtains; historically and geographically it is located in a different time and place from the rest of the play.²⁷ Christ is 'physically' present and explains to the Samaritan woman about the living waters of the true faith and that prayer directed to God should not be bound to time and place and can only be valid and efficacious if arising from inner faith (ll. 162-207). *Ongheleert Volck* (Uneducated People) then asks for elucidation of the scene and his guides explain that only his inner faith and the embracing of the commandments laid down in the *Pater Noster* and his prayers directly to God will bring forgiveness and salvation.

Toog II Figure. Christus staende inde duere, roepende (Christ standing in the door, calling). This second *toog* is not announced in the text except for the stage direction and comes after *Ongheleert Volck* has expressed his longing for God's mercy (ll. 337-379). It differs from the others in that it is the result, not of enquiring debate but of

explicit emotion: *Ongheleert Volck* becomes increasingly desperate as the explanations after the first *toog* unfold and realises that he has put his faith in quite the wrong *aflaten* [indulgences and means to salvation]. This culminates in an intensely emotional confession of wrongdoing and accompanying doubt that forgiveness and salvation could be extended to him as well. (ll. 301-319; 324-6; 334-6). *Evangelische Leeraer*'s consoling words that God will not remark his sins but receive him with mercy:

So en sal Godt u sonden niet aenmercken

maer hy sal u in ghenaden ontfangen.

[God will not punish you for your sins
but will receive you in mercy.]

evokes this response:

Och, naer Gods ghenaeede es al mijn verlanghen.

O Heere, ick belije met schreyende wangen,

dat ghij mij om mijn sonden vry muecht verderven.

[Oh, all my longing is for God's mercy.

Oh Lord, I acknowledge with tears on my face
that you might well condemn me for my sins.]

The stage direction accompanying the *toog*: "Christ standing in the door, calling" refers to a monologue in four stanzas, with a dense concoction of biblical quotations, all focused on the theme of 'come to me, I am the way, the truth and the life'. This too is an intensely emotional speech in which all Christ's powers of giving life, defeating death, rescuing from damnation, extending forgiveness, succour and consolation are poured out for the benefit of sinners. Yet, like the blow of a hammer the refrain line at the end of every stanza brings home the truth that those who will persist in rejecting these blessings will be damned: *Al zijdij verdomt, en wijtes mij niet* [when you are damned, do not reproach me].

After the last stanza *Ongheleert Volck*'s guides explain that forgiveness does need true remorse and the will to clear one's conscience. His specific request to have the significance of the refrain line explained is met with a restatement of the endless patience with which Christ will try and rescue even the most unwilling sinners; if they persist in not responding then it is not His fault that they are punished. Personal responsibility and active participation, through faith, in one's own salvation, is strongly advocated here. That 'active participation' does not mean that one's sins can in any way be bought off with gold, silver or good works but only by believing in Christ's sacrifice on the Cross for the sake of all sinners is stated clearly by the Servant of God:

Dienaer Gods

Oock seght Petrus sonderlinghe:

Ghy en sijt niet verlost met verganckelick silver of gout,

Maer met dat dierbaer bloet aen des crucen hout

Van een onschuldich lam onbevleect.

Siet binnen daer affiguere perfect. (ll. 595-598)

[You are not set free with perishable silver or gold,

But with that precious blood on the wood of the cross,
blood of an innocent unblemished lamb.

Look inside for a perfect demonstration of that.]

The third *toog* is then shown: *Figure. Schuyft de gordijne. Christus aent cruce hanghende. Dlam dwelck de zeven zeghels open ghedaen heeft.* [Tableau. Curtains are pulled open. Christ hanging on the Cross. The lamb which opened the seven seals.] It is not entirely clear what would have been shown here, Christ on the Cross **and** a lamb with seven seals, or whether the second sentence is meant as a short-hand exegesis of Christ's role in Revelations. Coigneau suggests that this *toog* might have consisted of a crucifix and a lamb and given that Christ does not speak in this instance, this is possible, though out of keeping with the other *togen*.²⁸ And, as Coigneau also says, this non-verbal, pictorial representation can be interpreted as deliberately different from such representations in Passion plays or indeed in other Catholic plays. *Evangelische Leeraer's* response to *Ongheleert Volck's* pressing request for an explanation does indeed enlarge upon that and he stresses that Christ's martyr's death is the only true and efficaceous *aflaat* (indulgence), that is to say the sole means to salvation.

It is worth noting that the response of the characters to the sight of Christ on the Cross is in the first place a cerebral one. *Ongheleert Volck* reacts with: *Och my tverstant voort vertrect* [Please explain this to me immediately] and *Evangelische Leeraer's* response is a careful exegesis rather than an invitation to adoration or prayer and/or an exhortation to consider the magnanimity of Christ's sacrifice or the horror of his suffering. That, too, is different from what is found in similar situations in Catholic plays.²⁹

The fourth *toog* is shown in reaction to *Ongheleert Volck's* request to be told *hoe soudick my selven timmeren, siet, tot eenen gheestelicken huuse, seght my tbediet.* (ll. 747-8)
[... how I should construct myself, do you see, as a spiritual house, do tell me that.]

Figure toocht Gheloovich mensche staende op den steen van Christus, ghecleet met een wit cleet, ghenamnt Christus' gherechticheyt, met eenen vierighen brant in zijn hant. [Tableau shows Faithful mankind standing on Christ's stone, clad in a white cloth named Christ's righteousness, with a fiery brand in his hand.] *Gheloovich mensche* does not speak and, unlike the other *togen*, this one is located in the here and now of the play and of the audience's reality: this is an explanation of mankind's body and soul as 'a spiritual house', the transformation of sinful man in general and a promise of the transformation of *Ongheleert Volck* if he follows the guidelines of his helpers.³⁰

²⁸ D. Coigneau (1989-90), p. 134.

²⁹ For instance, in the two *Pyramus and Thisbe* plays the sight of Christ on the Cross is followed by a detailed interpretation of its significance but it is also met with great emotion.

³⁰ Such a transformation image we find elsewhere too, notably in Lawet's *Spelen van de Verlooren Zoon*, though not as a *toog*: *Spiritual Inspiration* renames the Disconsolate Sinner as Well-consoled Mankind and this is then confirmed in a *toog* where Christ hangs on the Cross and speaks a long four-stanza refrain with the stock line: Come all to me, I am your only consolation. See E. G. A. Galama, *Twee zestiende-eeuwse spelen van de verlooren zoone door Robert Lawet* (Utrecht: N.V. Dekker & Van de Vegt, 1941), pp.195-198, vss. 884-988.

As in the reactions to the first two *togen* the explanations are very much geared towards the inner spiritual experience of faith, which can be experienced in any place and without any external ‘aids’. *Ongheleert Volck* is astonished when told that what he sees is *een gheestelick huys* [a spiritual house]:

Ick waende datter gheen ander gheestelicke huysen en waren

Dan capellen, cloosters, clusen en kercken (ll. 768-9)

[I thought there were no other spiritual houses

than chapels, cloisters, hermitages and churches.

His guides stress that what he beholds, Faithful Mankind on the rock which is Christ, is a living temple, that there is no need for churches or priests: the faithful together form the temple of God, their flesh and bones are Christ’s flesh and bones, an indissoluble unity. The fifth and last *toog*: *Figuerre. Christus bidt zijnen hemelschen Vader voor alle sondaren, segghende....*(Tableau: Christ praying to the heavenly Father on behalf of all sinners, saying...) After Christ’s prayer God responds but is not seen (*De vader spreekt antwoordende, maer hy en wort niet gesien*), confirming the message of forgiveness for all sinners who turn away from sin and embrace the faith.

It would seem then that at least in this one play, which we can set firmly in a dissident Lutheran context, there is a prominent use of the ‘imaging’ of the sacred, even of the Passion of Christ, and giving Christ a ‘speaking part’ in the dialogue with the Samaritan woman and in the monologue where he is calling the faithful and exhorting them to turn to him for salvation. This, clearly, is what the playwright felt to be efficacious in his message to his audience.

A much more complicated example of the use of *togen* occurs in Robert Lawet’s two plays of the prodigal son.³¹ Lawet had fled his native Roesselaere, possibly in 1577, to escape from the violence caused by clashes between a Walloon army and Ghent Calvinists and had settled in Bruges which at that time was a Calvinist stronghold. The manuscript of the plays mentions that he ‘completed’ the plays in Bruges. Lawet had been a member and a *componist* (a playwright) of the Roesselaere Chamber *De zeegbaere herten* (the principled or chaste hearts) and seven of his plays survive, three based on parables and four on other, devotional, material; two plays of Judith have disappeared. Galama, the editor of the plays, sees Lawet as a faithful Catholic who was not completely uncritical of some of the abuses in the worship of the Catholic Church. Whether the Prodigal Son Plays were performed in Bruges is unfortunately unknown and one is left with the enigmatic situation of a Catholic refugee finding shelter in what was at the time a militantly Calvinist town where he completes two plays which do indeed use the visual aids which occur often in the Mystery or Passion plays: Psalm 85, the meeting of the Four Daughters of God (who have speaking parts); Christ as the Good Shepherd; Christ carrying the Cross and dragged forward by the Jews; God the Father enthroned, with Charity, Hope and Faith beside him and a male figure called Good Will all with speaking parts); Moses with the tablets on which the Ten Commandments are written, with a female figure called the Fear of God beside him who comes out of the *toog* to chastise the Prodigal Son with a scourge and rod; Christ on the Cross (speaking);³² Christ

³¹ A detailed investigation of the visual aspects of those plays will be forthcoming in another publication but I mention them here as contrasting evidence.

³² See note 28.

Risen and Triumphant, crushing the fiend and death under his feet; the poor, hungry, thirsty and the captives³³; God the Father enthroned, Christ on his right hand and the Holy Spirit, with white clad figures kneeling before him with palm branches in their hands.

Lawet uses all these to drive home the message of ultimate forgiveness and, as I hope to show elsewhere, with a strong emphasis on the message that faith alone, and Christ's embodiment of that faith, will lead to salvation: a message which, delivered in this way, shows at the very least that, good Catholic that Lawet may have been, the strong Christocentric spirit which many dissident believers stressed, had influenced him too.

What is interesting is that as late as the 1580s, in the heartland of Calvinism, after the iconoclastic fury had destroyed so much in Flanders in particular and at the time that Orthodox Calvinists are raising their voices against the imaging of the sacred on the stage, against religious plays in general, that this playwright (oblivious?/blatantly?) write a play full of sacred visual representations. Whether he expected to have it performed, we do not know. All we can say is that he took immense care with the theatrical aspects of his play, with one eye at least, one would swear, on how the message could be embodied, driven home, could engage the audience, by means of some superb stagecraft. And this is an important point: whatever the specific religious convictions of the playwrights, they wrote for the theatre: the play was the thing!

A much larger scale, systematic, investigation of the representation of the sacred by means of *togen* on the Rhetoricians stage is clearly called for but I hope that with these few examples we might have a lively and fruitful debate at our conference in Lille.

*New Hall, Cambridge,
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³³ See page 2 above.