

Introduction

In the autumn of 1993, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences organized a colloquium on humanist rhetoric, French *rhétoriciens*, Dutch *rederijkers* and the visual arts in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The primary purpose of this gathering of fifty scholars from different countries was to explore the interrelations among these movements and to try to measure the impact of their connections on the literature and visual arts in France and the Netherlands during this period. While — from the perspective of long-established circumstantial relationships — this might seem an almost self-evident goal, two different reasons present themselves for considering this a rather daring undertaking.

In the first place, one might ask if the scholarly study of each of these movements has progressed far enough to make research into their mutual connections possible and fruitful. Dutch rhetoricians have long been the objects of critical scorn concerning the value of their literary output and much the same situation has held true for the French vernacular rhetoricians of the period. The works of these authors has interested scholars principally for its sociological and historical aspects, and not for its poetic qualities. Only since structuralism and semiotics helped promote a keen interest in the more formal aspects of literature did the poetics of the rhetoricians start to receive serious attention. The work of a scholar such as Paul Zumthor might be considered exemplary in this regard.

But a more contextual outlook — situating poetic conceptions within late Medieval and early Renaissance literary and philosophical developments — was needed before the idea of tracing interrelations between the two vernacular movements, and between these and humanist rhetoric, could even be imagined. Similarly, comparable developments in the field of art history have allowed scholars to move beyond the internal, diachronic approaches to style, technique and iconography that have long pre-occupied them. They began to develop a new sensibility to the subtle interweavings of verbal and visual phenomena, to the habits and skills shared in composing paintings and poems, in reading and looking.

Research in these directions started in the late 1960s, and has since the 1980s developed rapidly, although it still remains in its infancy. Many texts, for instance, are not yet published, or even studied, and the respective national

(Dutch, French) literary developments are still partly uncharted, while the essential problem of a Burgundian tradition, because of its lack of support from a 'national' literary history, remains unstudied in its specificity.

In the second place, it was not at all sure if research into these relations would yield substantial new insights. Self-evident as the connections among *rederijkers*, *rhétoriqueurs* and rhetoric — apparent even etymologically — might seem, one could nevertheless seriously question their scope. Some scholars have argued, with good reason, that the influence of the French *rhétoriqueurs* on the Dutch *rederijkers* is discernable only from the middle of the sixteenth century on, and that before that time literary inspiration in the Netherlands came primarily from Medieval Latin poetry. On the other hand, we do know that a vernacular tradition existed that was mainly inspired by Occitan and French examples. Specialists have also contended that a wide, even consciously maintained, gap separated the two vernacular literatures from the humanist movement.

To a large extent, these very uncertainties constituted the arguments for organizing the colloquium. Given the occurrence, in a relatively limited spatial area and temporal span, of such specific and unique cultural trends, their potential interrelations were bound to constitute an interesting field of investigation. And this would be all the more so if the objectives pursued were less concerned with providing definitive answers than with determining the proper questions and identifying scholarly lacunæ, with tracing out possible lines of future research.

What, for example, were the correspondences between the French and Burgundian *rhétoriqueurs*, or, in the Burgundian realm, between French and Dutch speaking rhetoricians? How do we define and explain their differences? And where and how did the humanist revival of classical rhetoric begin to create an impact on the vital and autonomous traditions of vernacular poetry? Why was the French *rhétoriqueur* movement largely eclipsed when it confronted the Italianism of the sixteenth century, while the Dutch *rederijker* movement was up to a certain extent able to incorporate this trend within itself? Why did a direct relationship between *rhétoriqueur* poetry and official historiography come into being in the Burgundian world, while nothing of the sort occurred in the French and Dutch traditions?

Furthermore, as has long been known, *rhétoriqueur* and *rederijker* movements had close circumstantial relations with the visual arts. Artists and architects participated in the planning and design of festive entries and dramatic productions, and also provided illustrations for literary texts. Painters, sculptors and architects were members of the *rederijker* chambers and on occasion themselves produced poetry or plays. The earliest indigenous art criticism, crucial to our understanding of the reception of the visual arts, came exclusively from humanists and from vernacular rhetoricians. What might the implications of these close ties be for the production and reception of works of art both visual and verbal?

And so specialists in the fields of the *seconde rhétorique*, French or Burgundian, of the Dutch *rederijkerij*, of humanist rhetoric and of sixteenth-century art

history were invited to take part in the colloquium. The proceedings of those days are now presented in this volume.

A rapid overview of the fifteen articles in this book reveals a number of common parameters under which the authors have approached the problems sketched above.

First of all comes the philosophical point of view presented in the keynote address given by François Rigolot, who rightly stresses that at the basis of all the onomastic and semantic constructs, all the virtuosic displays of *rhyme* and *rhythme* — the *musique naturelle* of which the rhetoricians were so fond — lay the figurative, analogical and logical ways of thinking of scholastic philosophy. Whether this was an autumn of the Middle Ages or a springtime for a new period, is probably a rather sterile question. But one of the causes of poetic change in this period may very well be the rise of a more discursive and persuasive type of reasoning.

In this context Francis Goyet emphasizes the argumentative and didactic aims of the rhetoric of Agricola and Melancthon, which we might regard as constitutive of sixteenth-century rhetorical developments. Peter Mack, stressing even more the fundamental nature of this development, illustrates the utility of humanist rhetoric for both practical writing as well as for the analysis of texts in view of practical writing. But Mack points also to the fact that Agricola himself combined structures from classical oratory with those of Medieval sermon-writing in his *Oration on Christ's Nativity*.

All this suggests that an awareness of the logical-, or rhetorical-argumentative structure of vernacular texts might provide a fruitful starting point for analyzing the paths of their historical change. Marijke Spies, for example, argues that the main influences on Dutch *rederijker* poetics through the mid-century came from the Medieval *artes prædicandi*, rather than from the *arts de seconde rhétorique*.

From a different perspective Kees Meerhoff shows how, in the transition from logical to more persuasive aims, humanist concepts of description (*ekphrasis*) and epideictic composition pervaded the traditional wealth of ornamental devices. Peter Sharratt proposes that this phenomenon may have been paralleled — if not furthered — by the type of classically oriented book illustrations artists such as Bernard Salomon produced. Mark Meadow also turns to the practical function of rhetoric and points to the argumentative strategies in compositional or organizational structures common to sixteenth-century Netherlandish painting, ephemeral architecture for public spectacles and the *rederijker* stage.

Another rubric under which some of the papers can be grouped is that of sociological or geographical concerns. Several authors draw our attention to the differences between the poets of the French and those of the Burgundian court, between those of the courts and those of the towns and between those of the towns in French speaking regions and those in Dutch speaking. Some of the scholars analyze these differences at the level of social context, while others, to

whom we will turn later, consider their object from a more strictly technical point of view.

In the broader social context of literary production, the distinction between individualism and collectivism is one of the first aspects which we must consider. François Rigolot presents us with an analysis of the personal emotive force which Jean Lemaire de Belges was able to express within the formally restrictive bounds of his poetry, and thereby demonstrates that a formal poetic doctrine does not by definition exclude literary subjectivity. Dirk Coigneau provides an interesting contrast through his confirmation of the communal nature of writing poetry within the Dutch 'chambers of rhetoric'. His survey of the poetic difference between these chambers and the French *pays* offers a sound basis for further research, since the *pays* of the French towns represent an intermediate phenomenon between individual and collective literary expression. They were akin to the Dutch 'chambers' in terms of organization, but differed from them in that they also provided a platform to individual poets from other communities, including several of the *rhétoriciens*.

The issue of genres is one closely related to this social concerns. Specific to the Dutch 'chambers' are theatrical productions. Coigneau supposes an old tradition of communal religious festivities into which the poetic conceptions of the French rhetoricians intruded at a certain moment. Jelle Koopmans, however, draws attention to the theatrical activities of the French *pays* and related organisations in the French towns, in which at times the *rhétoriciens* of the courts also participated, as well as members of the legal profession and professional groups. He suggests that an intermingling between French and Burgundian court poetry and Dutch municipal literary activities might also be found in the *pays*, a point deserving of future investigation. Reindert Falkenburg raises the issue of genre in relation to the production and reception of Pieter Aertsen's paintings, exploring the intricacies established through the simultaneous creation of new genres and evocation of classical ones.

The technical means and devices utilized by the rhetoricians in their poetry form our third parameter. Undoubtedly the most difficult to grasp are their ideas concerning rhyme and meter and their relationship. Here Marc-René Jung's contribution may be regarded as fundamental. It furthers not only the understanding of the differences between the French and the Burgundian *rhétoriciens* in this regard, as also meticulously analyzed from a different perspective by Claude Thiry, but also provides the basis for a more adequate evaluation of the metrical revolution brought about by the Pléiade.

The national, vernacular alternatives to classical hexameters, pentameters and disticha as developed by the French *rhétoriciens* — in terms of feminine and masculine rhymes and fixed numbers of syllables — were taken over by the Dutch *rederijker* Matthijs de Castelein, whose unprecedented importance as a theorician is emphasized by Dirk Coigneau. However, only a single decade after the publication of his *Art of Rhetoric* efforts were made in the Southern Netherlands too to incorporate classical metres into vernacular poetry.

Werner Waterschoot, combining a technical and an historical approach, has shown how these endeavors were continued in the Northern Netherlands, first by a group of poets connected to the newly founded Leyden University and then elsewhere.

Only the most general outlines of this transition from *Musique naturelle* to neoplatonically inspired metrical harmony have been drawn so far, and much work in this area remains to be done, especially on the empirical level. Further research, incorporating the study of the many still unpublished texts by rhetoricians, may yield valuable new insights into the very nature of this transition.

Marijke Spies has argued that there existed a pronounced discrepancy between the concepts of harmony as understood by the Leyden classicists and the ideas on rhetorical argumentation espoused by the Amsterdam rhetoricians. In this respect there must also be given consideration to the rôle played by other elocutionary devices, such as descriptions and comparisons, and on the visual side of things to the function of *ekphrasis* versus that of *exempla*.

This brings us to the fourth and last of our parameters, the pictural. Sharing as they did concerns of invention and disposition of material, as well as persuasive aims, the intersections of painting (or other visual arts) and rhetoric would appear to offer fertile ground for research. Reindert Falkenburg engages issues of genre and decorum, suggesting that artists, like authors, play with the expectations raised by critical categories, invoking the ironic encomium in particular to explain discrepancies between subject matter and format. Working from the perspective of defineable perceptual and interpretive skills, Mark Meadow shows that argumentative structures, in this case employing culturally sanctioned *exempla*, are shared in the organization of paintings and such rhetorically loaded public spectacles as festive entries and *rederijker* theater.

Approaching the persuasive functions of visual representation from a different angle, Peter Sharratt discusses the rôle played by the humanist concerns with *ekphrasis* and *enargeia* (or *illustratio*) in the reception of book illustrations, a topic already raised on the poetic side by Kees Meerhoff. A further line of research might be to consider if notions of the 'colourfulness' of elocutionary 'flowers', as in a *Jardin de Plaisance*, had any parallels in the visual arts, in terms of a relatively autonomous concept of expression. In the same vein, the various allegorical visualizations that, in the form of biblical, historical or mythological fictions, were subsumed under the term *poetrie* by the rhetoricians themselves, must have been seen in relation to the *histories* produced by playwrights, painters and printmakers.

Just as the authors of the period sought to fashion themselves through the construction of theoretical frameworks by which their poetry and prose might be understood, so too did artists explore abstract issues of theory. And, like their literary counterparts, these efforts were not confined to explicitly theoretical treatises, but were incorporated into the very fabric and subject matter of their artistic production. Nina Serebrennikov's contribution examines the crucial

issue of the relationship between *ars* and *usus*, a matter of great concern to poets and playwrights as well, but here in specific relation to the conceptualization of *Pictura* and *Sculptura* as examples of either the practical or the liberal arts.

These questions and concerns of genre and decorum, of theory and practice, of argumentative structures and strategies, shared by artist and author alike, provide the basis by which such disparate media as poetry and painting might fruitfully be compared. The theatre, which combines poetry and visual representation in a potent manner, was both highly regarded by the rhetoricians and provided work and subject matter for artists, and thus it should prove a fertile ground for future scholarship.

Notwithstanding their differences and idiosyncracies, the *rhétoriciens* in France and Burgundy and the *rederijkers* in the Netherlands did share a common bond in the highly self-conscious natures of their cultural movements. Given their artistic and intellectual pretensions, we can easily understand the aggression with which they sought to distinguish themselves from other vernacular poets, a sentiment reciprocated on the other side. In his closing address, Herman Pleij calls our attention to this vituperative tendency of the ‘despisers of rhetoric’. Indeed, part of the self-consciousness of the rhetoricians lies in the fact that they represented a highly autonomous movement that aspired to establish a vernacular equivalent to the classically inspired conceptions of the humanists. Hence the deep contempt from the humanist side for their lack of ‘real’ learning, for the glitter and pomp of their poetry, a contempt which still lingers in much modern scholarship.

Being — or wishing to be — autonomous and intellectual, the rhetoricians’ movement formed an inevitable battleground for traditions from the past on one side and innovative trends on the other, a crisis common to the visual arts as well. One of the challenges for future research will be to unravel — at the level of concepts and at that of the artefacts themselves — the traditions from the transformations, the influences from the innovations. Such research indeed may productively be interdisciplinary in nature.

We hope that the publication of this volume will serve to give a vital impulse to that research. The movement of the *rhétoriciens* and the *rederijkers* has significance not only as a transitional phenomenon between the Latinate culture of the Medieval period and the classicizing literatures of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but also for its own intrinsic qualities. The output of these rhetoricians was, after all, the first statement of the cultural ambitions of the national elites.

Neither the colloquium itself nor the present volume of proceedings would have been possible without the help of many colleagues. While several of the authors acknowledge the scholar who served as ‘their’ respondent, the true impact of all respondents in the discussions and the final form of the papers deserves special mention. Those who were present will remember their insightful remarks and their generosity.

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Finally, a very select audience of invited experts was kind enough to engage in lively discussions with both speakers and respondents, ensuring the success of the colloquium. To all we express our sincere appreciation. To the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences we offer our thanks for serving as such a generous host.

The Editors

