

Aims

This project starts from two observations pertaining to the field of Dutch early modern studies; the first of these is a growing interest in early modern authorial self-presentation. Various research projects in the field inquire into the literary career strategies of early modern authors like Jan Vos, Constantijn Huygens, and Joost van den Vondel, in the vein of career criticism. The second observation is the telling lack of interest in the role of religious poetry in research on authorial self-presentation. Vondel's long poem *Altaergeheimenissen* (1645) has remained largely unstudied for the better part of fifty years (apart from a series of lectures on the poem's contemporary relevance by Frans Kellendonk and a recent translation by Chris Joby). A research project on the career strategies of Vondel that is currently being carried out at the University of Amsterdam focuses on the economic and material aspects of Vondel's career, thereby already excluding the self-presentation that emerges from the didactic religious poem from its scope. The great interest in Huygens' self-presentation of his career as an author, diplomat and patron to the arts within Dutch studies has largely focused on his secular work and his elaborate correspondence. The collection of religious poetry *Avondmaalsgedichten* has gone almost unnoticed since Zwaan's edition of 1968.

I start from the hypothesis that *Altaergeheimenissen* and *Avondmaalsgedichten* can be read as instances of what Regina Mara Schwartz has called 'sacramental poetics' and that an in-depth analysis of Vondel's and Huygens' poems, is not only crucial to a proper understanding of these authors' idea of a literary career but that it informs an understanding of a broader development within early modern literature as well. My project aims to trace the sacral core of a type of early modern poetics as it relates to the historical socio-cultural development of growing autonomy within the literary system, by means of an analysis of *Altaergeheimenissen* and *Avondmaalsgedichten*. I want to know (1) how the emergence of modern autonomous literature is shaped by the penetration of (sacramental) religious experience in the realm of the literary, a phenomenon which has in itself been attested to in international early modern studies; (2) how this development relates to an evolution in the conceptualization of the role of the author. By relating the concept of the sacral as it emerges from these instances of religious poetry to Vondel's and Huygens' authorial self-presentation, I aim to analyze what made possible the development that William Marx described as the sacralization of the author. Furthermore, my project is aimed at making a conceptual contribution to the methodology of career criticism.

Background and focus

In *L'Adieu à la littérature* Marx describes the earliest phase of the emergence of the modern concept of literature in terms of the sacralization of the author. This is the result of what Marx sees as the introduction of the concept of the Sublime in literary theory, via Boileau's translation of ps-Longinus' *On the Sublime* in 1674. (Marx 39) Through the focus on the Sublime, Marx asserts, the poet is made into a High Priest providing direct access to reality through total transparency of the Word. (Marx 42) The introduction of the Sublime in poetry fills a void in classicist rhetorical theory by adding what Marx calls a *je-ne-sais-quoi* that puts emotion rather than technique at the centre of literature. This void is defined by Marx as the problem of 'aesthetic communication': while classicist rhetoric was centered on the author and his/her attempt at following literary models, the Sublime introduced the perspective of the reader by focusing on the *experience* of literature. (Marx 40) Through the Sublime, literature is ascribed a supernatural power: it claims to render language transparent. As a consequence, literature is professed to be near to godliness in its power to create the presence of its referents. Subsequently, poets become its High Priests. At the height of this development, literature becomes an autonomous cultural domain that starts to lose its social relevance as a result of its autonomy. The sacralization of the author thus forms the starting point of the story Marx wants to tell, namely that of the devaluation of literature from the 18th century onward. I want to look at what preceded it and made it possible.

My project wants to put forward the hypothesis that the early modern mechanism that lies at the heart of the emergence of an autonomous literary domain is the insertion of sacral experience in the secular realm of art. Therefore I want to compare the introduction of the Sublime in literary theory to Schwartz' definition of 'sacramental poetics' as a function of a specific sort of early modern poetry; the sort of poetry that shares with the Christian Sacraments a concern with the way in which, if at all, a sign can evoke the sacred. It is a type of devotional poetry that aims to collapse form and content in order to create metaphysical presence. Marx describes an 18th-century development of the literary field while Schwartz's focus is on specific 16th- and 17th-century literary texts by authors such as Herbert, Milton and Donne. However, the phenomena they describe hold in common an ideal of language that for Marx finds its origins in the concept of the Sublime

while for Schwartz it is the result of the transposition of the sacramental to the realm of secular art. My hypothesis is that sacramental poetics profoundly influenced the introduction of the concept of the Sublime in early modern poetics and as such already provided a foundation for the sacralization of the author. Marx's figural sacralization, in my hypothesis, is historically connected to a literal sacralization of the author in early modern poetry. Sacramental poetics are characterized by an engagement in making present what is absent, they ascribe to literature an evocative power that is similar to that of the Sacrament of the Eucharist and that is described as a, nearly divine, surplus of meaning – Marx's Sublime *je-ne-sais-quoi* forms its secular counterpart. (Schwartz 6) The problem of the Eucharist was already from a very early point in its history onward related to questions of textuality. In the 9th century, two possible approaches to the Sacrament were put forward; it could be regarded as an outward sign of inner grace or as the inner meaning of an external sign. In the first approach the emphasis is on the objectivity of the Sacrament as a sacred sign (verbal commitment), in the second the emphasis is on interpretation (of the religious mystery). The Sacrament, in the second approach becomes an object of thought, thereby moving from the realm of the experience to that of the text. (Stock 253)

The autonomization of literature is understood by Marx to be *the result of* the sacralization of the author. I, however, start from the assumption that both processes are entwined and inform each other reciprocally (rather than being a matter of straightforward cause and effect). Marx's characterization of the 18th century author as the High Priest of literature is echoed by Schwartz's emphasizing of the role of the early modern artist in sacramental poetics: 'In Christ the work of art is also the Artist. And this identity can enable us to venture further in our understanding of a sacramental poetics – as one in which the artist becomes indistinguishable from his art. The expression and the subject that produce it are joined inseparably: in a deep sense, we see the artist in his work.' (Schwartz 8) What interests me is the way in which the sacramental poetics of particular early modern texts influenced the double development (of the sacralization of the author and the autonomization of literature) that Marx describes. I mean to test my hypothesis against two early modern bodies of work that express the concerns of sacramental poetics. Moreover they are written by two authors with an exceptionally explicit and often expressed self-presentation, especially within the 17th century Dutch context, and thus allow for a methodological approach that takes its cue from career criticism.

(1) Written about six years after his conversion to Catholicism, Vondel's *Altaergeheimenissen* is a defence of the central Catholic sacrament – a lyrical glorification of the real presence of the body of Christ in the Eucharist. It is a testimony of Vondel's struggle with the Eucharist: his conversion to Catholicism hinged on his acceptance of the transubstantiation of the host. It is an instance of devotional poetry; that is defined, as opposed to other religious – didactic or theological – poetry, as poetry that expresses a personal relation of a lyric persona to religion – of any denomination. It is self-reflective, personal and characterized by both imagination and emotion. (see: Cave 1-62) The poem runs to more than 5000 lines and consists of three parts: 'Offerspijze', 'Offereere', and 'Offerande' (roughly translated as 'Sacrificial food', 'Ceremonial offering' and 'Offering' or 'Sacrifice').

(2) Huygens took pleasure in sharply convicting Vondel's text in the form of a well known short satirical poem thereby adding to the controversy already surrounding the publication of that work. His own series of *Avondmaalsgedichten* (1642-1684) forms a collection of eighteen poems written on the Holy Communion. They can be read as the Counter-Remonstrant's counterpart to Vondel's text – focusing on the symbolical and memorial functions of the ritual as opposed to the real presence of the body of Christ. These poems too are characterized by a personal relation between the author and the divine. They are deeply marked by a concern with the way in which art can evoke sacral truth.

An analysis of *Altaergeheimenissen* and *Avondmaalsgedichten* will allow me to inquire into the extent to which the changes in thinking about the nature of signs that resulted from debates on the Eucharist, debates in texts by Luther, Zwingli, Karlstadt, Cranmer, and others, impacted early modern poetics. Analyzed together, I believe that these two bodies of work will provide me with an insight into the complex relations between the controversies surrounding the Sacraments and the autonomization of literature in the early modern period. Both bodies of work refract a different side of the debate surrounding the Eucharist and do so in a personal lyrical style that strongly displays its authorial intentions. These poems can therefore inform me on the way these concepts of the sacral crystallize in the figure of the author.

Method, planning and output

I started from the growing interest in authorial self-presentation in Dutch early modern studies in the vein of

career criticism. My focus on the sacralization of the author calls for the same methodology; since it is supremely suited to chart the shift in authorial self-presentation as it relates to the insertion of the sacral. My focus however also necessitates a reflection on the method's assumptions. The general thesis underlying career criticism is that the idea of a literary career evolves throughout a poet's life and that the figure of Virgil is central to it. (Cheney 12) My analysis of the influence of sacramental poetics on the early modern concept of the author will offer a change in perspective. Early modern sacralization of the author necessitates the use of a different template, or at least one that is complementary to the social-artistic template provided by Virgil's idea of a poetical career. (for the importance of Virgil to early modern authorial self-presentation, see: Lipking; for the importance of Virgil to Vondel's career see: Prandoni) As my research aims pertain to a broad cultural phenomenon the impact of the sacral on these authors' self-presentation is not limited to these instances of devotional poetry; the sacralization of the author indeed intrudes upon these authors' overall idea of a career. I will therefore investigate the extent to which the intrusion of the sacral in Vondel's and Huygens' poetic calls for an different modeling of the overall authorial self-presentation. Anne Lake Prescott offers the example of David as an alternative template for authors of early modern religious poetry. Since I put forward a literal sacralization of the author through sacramental poetics, I will investigate the extent to which the authorial self-presentation of Vondel's and Huygens' careers is modeled after Christ.

Oct 2011 – Sept 2012: The first step in my research will be an analysis of the extent to which the Eucharistic debates I have mentioned are taken up by Vondel and Huygens and of the way in which they are reflected and refracted by the poems, especially since Vondel was on the Catholic and Huygens on the Reformed side of this very complex issue. Consequently I must tease out whether or not the different theological approaches to the Eucharist (questions of "real presence" versus "memorial function") in fact correspond to poetical differences. This will require an extensive study of the theological texts themselves as well as a close reading of the poems. This first phase of my research must result in a peer reviewed article on the presence on the Eucharist debates in *Altaergeheimenissen* and *Avondmaalsgedichten*.

Oct 2012 – Sept 2013: In a second phase I will analyze Vondel's and Huygens' authorial self-presentation by means of Vondel's poetical prose (see: Lieven Rens) and Huygens' correspondence about his poetry – partially included by Zwaan in his edition. Subsequently I will relate their self-presentation as it emerges from these texts to the poetics of the *Altaergeheimenissen* and *Avondmaalsgedichten*. This will allow me to trace the *differentia specifica* of the infusion of the sacral in their poetics. This second phase must result in a peer reviewed article on the impact of the sacral in Vondel's and Huygens' self-presentation.

Oct 2013 – Sept 2014: The last phase of my research will consist of correlating my corpus to the broad cultural development I have described. It will result in the preparation of a peer reviewed article on the sacralization on the author and a reflection on the method of career criticism. I will also prepare a book on the relation between religious literature and the autonomization of literature in the 17th century.

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