



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Introduction

Bloemendal, J.; Ford, P.

Publication date

2008

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Neo-Latin drama: forms, functions, receptions

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Bloemendal, J., & Ford, P. (2008). Introduction. In J. Bloemendal, & P. Ford (Eds.), *Neo-Latin drama: forms, functions, receptions* (pp. 1-5). (Noctes Neolatinae; No. 9). Olms.

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

Introduction

Early modern Latin drama was a European affair. Plays circulated throughout Europe. Levinus Brechtus wrote and staged his *Euripus* in the Southern Netherlands, but the play found its way to the Jesuit schools of Germany, *Hecastus* by Georgius Macropedius originated from the Low Countries, but was printed, staged, and translated all over Europe. The Scottish author George Buchanan moved to France, he worked there at the Collège de Guyenne in Bordeaux, and editions and translations of his plays found their way throughout the whole of Europe. This is one aspect of the reception of Latin theatre: its dissemination through print and play and its possible reception through these media in a European context. A second aspect is the fact that it is a form of reception in itself. *Hecastus* already mentioned is a translation or adaptation of the Dutch play *Elckerlijc*, Buchanan adapted the story of Jephtha from the Old Testament to make it fit into a tragedy, others reworked biblical stories like that of the Prodigal Son into comedies or *fabulae sacrae*. These authors also used the form of the Roman comedy, especially that of Terence, to ‘improve it’ in a Christian way. Almost all plays aimed at diffusion through being read in the classroom or being staged before an audience. The authors wanted to improve the readers or spectators in a programme of Christian ethics or dogmas. To this end they used all kinds of strategies to influence in some way or another the minds of their pupils and other spectators. This is the third aspect of reception. In this volume on Latin drama, these three types of receptions – in the plural since ‘reception’ is a multifarious affair – are discussed.

But then the questions arise. What made a play interesting enough to be circulated? What processes were active when dramas were received? To what extent and how were stories or plays subject to appropriation? What kind of dialogue with their sources were the authors engaged in? Which, if any, processes of acculturation or alienation were active?¹ What values were transmitted to the audience? How successful were the attempts to influence the audience. What does ‘influence’ or intended reception in this respect mean? And how could one assess this influence?

¹ Cf. Lorna Hardwick, *Reception Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003 (Greece & Rome 33), esp. pp. 9-11.

In this volume, papers presented at the Thirteenth Congress of the International Association of Neo-Latin Studies at Budapest, 6-13 August 2006 are collected. Particularly in two special sessions, on Buchanan and on the Reception of Drama, organised by Philip Ford and Jan Bloemendal, papers on dramatic production were delivered. Whether it be coincidental or not, all the papers presented at the IANLS conference somehow dealt with reception in or of drama. In this volume these papers are supplemented with an essay on the reception of Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* by Guilielmus Gnapheus.

The volume starts with a general article on the actual reception of drama in the readers' or audience's minds. JAN BLOEMENDAL assesses the 'impact' of drama and the possibilities and limitations of research on that topic, focusing on biblical drama. It is important to know how the audience became acquainted with the plays, what they understood, and what escaped their notice. To define the possible or actual influence, one may look at the plays' content, style and structure, to what the authors says about it in the prefaces and letters of dedication, in the prologues and the epilogues, and to the measures magistrates took in fear of the reactions a play might arouse. By their various receptions plays could influence 'public opinion', which could be a threat to the government. Bloemendal ends in a pessimistic mode, pointing out all the theoretical barriers we run into when investigating the interaction between the theatre and public opinion, and concludes that almost nothing can be said about the actual impact or influence of drama.

JULIETTE GROENLAND takes a more positive standpoint. She assesses history plays, especially those on the assassination of William of Orange, the *pater patriae*. His death was a great loss for the Netherlands, at least Daniel Heinsius in his *Auriacus, sive Libertas saucia* presents it thus. *Libertas* (Liberty) is wounded and leaves the country. Heinsius later added a scene in which his son Prince Maurice appears as a *deus ex machina* stating that he will avenge his father. In discussing the strategies employed in history plays Groenland assesses the appropriation of subject matter, which was adapted to deal with topical issues. As she states, at least the humanists themselves were not pessimistic about what they could achieve with their plays.

Buchanan was deemed to have enjoyed such an influential reception in France that he was even called the 'godfather' of French tragedy. Two articles are devoted to this Scottish playwright. GIACOMO CARDINALI discusses the influence of Buchanan alongside Marc-Antoine Muret on the development of French drama written in the vernacular and qualifies his importance. A dramatist had to reckon with theoretical precepts of tragedy, too, and he had the examples of both Buchanan and Muret, which he places in the tradition of tragedy 'à la latine', that is: tragedies divided into five acts, with four or five

choral odes at regular places, and ‘à la grecque’, with a variable number of scenes divided by choruses that could also intervene in the action. Muret followed the straightforward model of the Roman playwright Seneca and he treated a subject taken from Roman history, Buchanan the more sophisticated form of the Greek poet Euripides to write tragedies in which he combined Judeo-Christian themes with the theme of Fortune. Cardinali concludes that from the point of view of themes and subjects, or the structure of tragedy, Buchanan seems quite unimportant for the development of French tragedy. In a more general view, Buchanan was very influential: he paved the way for writing tragedy in the first place, showing that it is a lively genre, and forcing the students to look at the theatricality of tragedy, and to consider it not only as a text.

CARINE FERRADOU assesses the reception of Buchanan’s tragedies and his political treatises in reformed countries, but she does so in the light of his correspondence, especially with important literary or reformer men like Daniel Rogers, Thomas Randolph, Christopher Plantin and James VI of Scotland. She discusses the rapid, wide and lasting dissemination of Buchanan’s tragic and political works, their favourable reception in Great Britain, and their more moderate, even hostile, reception in the rest of Europe. Readers from all over Europe – ardent Protestants, Roman Catholics and moderate readers – defined their own standpoints regarding political philosophy and the role of monarchs in the state. Whether they agreed with Buchanan’s views or not, all readers admired his literary talent, even in an age in which the differences of opinion hardened.

JEAN-FRÉDÉRIC CHEVALIER discusses the five tragedies that the French Jesuit playwright Nicolas Caussin, a spiritual adviser to King Louis XIII, published in 1620. These tragedies were written in the style of Seneca, and treated biblical, hagiographical and historical subjects. In one of his plays, *Theodoricus*, Caussin gave a surprising portrait of Boethius’ and Symmachus’ prosecution by Theodoric, King of the Visigoths. Chevalier assesses the ‘chastisement of extravagance’ that is apparent in this play, which can also be discovered in Caussin’s two biblical tragedies, *Nabuchodonosor* and *Solyma*, taken from Daniel, and from 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles and Jeremiah). In the first play, Caussin combined a biblical story, on the immoderateness of Nebuchadnezzar II, a Senecan form found in *Hercules Oetaeus* and *Oedipus*, and a French model, viz. Robert Garnier’s *Les Juifves*. In *Solyma*, Caussin presented the immoderateness of king Sedekiah. Here, too, Caussin combined receptions of biblical, Senecan and Garnierian elements.

In 1544 the English martyrologist and playwright John Foxe (1516-1587) wrote the play *Titus et Gesippus*; its story is the same as one in Boccaccio's *Decamerone*: two friends 'marry' the same lady. The form and function of Foxe's play are the subject of the paper by HOWARD NORLAND. Apparently the comedy was meant for a college performance. Foxe combined Terentian form with the internal structure imposed on it by Donatus (of *protasis*, *epitasis* and *catastasis*) and Boccaccio's story, which he read in the version of it in Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Booke named the Governour*. In the play, Foxe presents a story of true friendship, based on Terentian elements and ancient yet contemporary views on the subject. In the play he sought to 'christianise' Terence. Norland clearly defines the ways that these receptions took place.

FIDEL RÄDLE deals with the dramas by the German Jesuit author Georg Bernardt looking at the form and function of humour in these plays. Humour is their most conspicuous feature, which gives them a lively theatrical temper. He starts with the Jesuit psychological theory of humour that should add to the impact drama had on the ethical improvement of the pupils. The forms vary from wordplay and hyperbolic metaphor to comic actions, irony, the motif of the 'inverted world' and parody. The cogency of Bernardt's humour is that it is not something added to the plot, but integrated into it, so that it might help the audience's conversion to a Christian life.

MICHIEL VERWEIJ looks at the intended reception of the Latin dramas by the Haarlem rector and playwright Cornelius Schonaeus by looking at the letters of dedications or prefaces to the *Tobaenus*. In these preliminary texts, he sees a development: there are changes of tone and theme to be noticed. As a result, instead of an author who is looking for support, increasingly a self-conscious playwright who has earned a place in European literature comes to the foreground. In the letters of dedication to the town magistrates of Haarlem of 1569 and 1580 Schonaeus is modest. For in spite of the city of Haarlem's taking the side of Protestantism, the Catholic rector was maintained in his position. But while in these letters of dedication he stresses that friends urged him to publish his play, in 1592 he is more confident and gives his own programme: his work is good for his own reputation, useful for the young, and a joy for the learned. He also expresses the doctrine of the 'Christianised Terence'. The clergy – be it Roman Catholic or Protestant – always looked over their shoulder, so the use of classical knowledge in a Christian context had to be defended time and again. In the dedicatory letter of 1598 Schonaeus abandons the idea of being urged to publish his plays: he himself makes the decisions. So although preliminary texts are often very topical, we can still see how an author develops.

In the final paper, VERENA DEMOED searches for the ways in which Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* was used by Guilielmus Gnapheus in his *Morosophus* (1541). The play deals with the musician Morus, who one day decides he will become an astronomer and his name will be Morosophus. The general theme of *Morosophus* and *Praise of Folly* is similar: the fool who in his foolishness says wise things. But Gnapheus also borrowed some specific motifs from Erasmus, for instance the philosopher's mantle and beard, and an indirect allusion to the 'Christian ecstasy'.

Thus all contributions in some way add to our knowledge of various forms of reception and neo-Latin drama. To assess it, we may look at the texts themselves, and to their imitation of Terence or Seneca, or of other playwrights, to the way they treat biblical or historical subjects, or to the preliminary texts the authors added to their plays. We should also look at certain themes, their forms and function, for instance humour and the theme of the wise fool. In any case, it is clear that early modern Latin drama was a lively genre, taking on many forms, features and functions. Also in its receptions, adapting earlier concepts or texts themselves, or being imitated in other works, it exhibits a lively variety of forms.

We wish to thank the editorial board of the *Neulateinisches Jahrbuch*, especially Marc Laureys and Astrid Steiner-Weber, for their willingness to make this collection of papers on neo-Latin drama one of the issues of *Noctes Neolatinae* and for their support. Thanks are also due to Han Lamers, BA, who went through the whole manuscript. We also thank Clare College (Cambridge), the Huygens Institute KNAW (The Hague), the Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research NWO and the Pegasus Foundation for their financial support. We express the hope that reading this volume will be as informative and pleasant as producing it has been to us.

Jan Bloemendal

Philip Ford