



Feike Dietz, ***Litteraire levensaders. Internationale uitwisseling van woord, beeld en religie in de Republiek*** (Hilversum: Verloren, 2012, 370 pp., ISBN 978 90 8704 280 6).

In *Litteraire levensaders* ('Literary life lines') Feike Dietz has infused her literary research with vital spirit from the history of religion. 'Religious transfusion' is the pivotal concept in this PhD-dissertation defended at Utrecht University in 2012. Dietz explores the exchange of poetic and graphic motifs in religious literature among rival confessions in the Dutch Republic between, roughly, 1600 and 1750.

Historiographically, Dietz takes part in two related historical debates. The first concerns the social and cultural character of pietism in seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. Which devotional tools did pietists employ, and what does that imply as to their relationship with the Public Church? The second looks into the mechanisms of confessional coexistence in the Dutch Republic. Was there really a 'social ecumenism', as posited repeatedly in the wake of an essay by Willem Frijhoff of the 1980s: easy commercial and social exchange between members of different confessions, sidestepping ecclesiastical affiliations? Following up on recent literary and art historical research, Dietz qualifies the notion of 'social ecumenism'. Confessional boundaries were drawn more sharply than received opinion would suggest, at least in the field of illustrated religious literature.

Dietz aims at determining whether interconfessional exchange in the literary domain of the Dutch Republic resulted from social interactions between book producers (authors, printers, publishers and engravers). Conceptually Dietz draws on terminology which have become current in the anthropologically inspired cultural history of social interactions and translation. The author coins the term 'religious transfusion' for the specific Dutch interconfessional appropriation of religious literature through intermediaries. She claims that the medical metaphor is applicable to the Dutch devotional literary landscape because it suggests both the indirect process of exchange, and a certain affinity between giver and receiver.

For her investigation of 'religious transfusion' Dietz has traced the reception and appropriation of the Catholic emblem book *Pia Desideria* among Dutch Protestants. The *Pia Desideria* was a product of a Jesuit vogue of emblematics that developed in the Southern Netherlands in the sixteenth century. *Pia Desideria* constituted an unmistakably Catholic tradition, with affective images enriched by a layered textual apparatus that was

intellectually challenging and emotionally moving at the same time. Its emphasis on personal, internal conversion appealed to Protestant pietists as much as Catholics. Dietz explores its appropriation in the seventeenth-century Republic by studying both the technical aspects of the production of adaptations, and changes in the contents.

The book is organized around a sequence of instances of appropriation of the *Pia Desideria*. The first Dutch adaptations of the Antwerp original were Catholic. The Amsterdam publisher Pieter Paets introduced *Pia Desideria* to the Republic in the 1620s. In an impressive reconstruction of Paets' Catholic list, Dietz demonstrates the reuse of elements of the *Pia desideria*-emblems in Dutch translations of medieval devotional texts. Paets adapted the emblems to the Dutch public, less intellectualistic than their foreign counterparts. Further Catholic adaptations were differentiated according to the specific aim with which they were produced, in effect constituting completely new literary products.

Around 1650 the first Protestant adaptation of *Pia Desideria* was executed by the mystic spiritualist Petrus Serrarius. His interest in visual instruments to effect internal 'rebirth' was stimulated by contacts with Comenius and the English Hartlib circle. Serrarius followed the example of his English contacts in using the images of *Pia Desideria*, but he radically adapted the texts and the structure of the book to Protestant needs. He replaced the intricate, often paganizing lyrics and Patristic texts by simple verses and biblical quotations. Moreover, the new lay-out cancelled the emblems' functionality in Jesuit contemplative techniques. Serrarius' emblems constituted an inner dialogue aimed at unification with God.

In 1691 Johannes Boekholt reworked Serrarius' emblems into *Goddelyke liefdevlammen*. Boekholt's German background and his ties with Lutheran pietists caused yet another shift in functionality. The inner process that the pietists attempted to effect was sensual rather than dialogical, a stimulation of all five senses. Earlier German adaptations of *Pia Desideria* in that vein inspired Boekholt in his adaptation of Serrarius' sacred love emblems.

After 1700 appropriations of *Pia Desideria* highlight a dramatic shift in cultural sensitivities. They lost their expressiveness as an instrument of devotion. Various reprints of earlier adaptations and reuses of the pictures show that the *Pia Desideria*-corpus remained in vogue for pedagogic or entertaining purposes, but ceased to mobilize religious sentiments. It did not live up to the new religious values of the Enlightenment. They became the stuff of children's books.

Dietz concludes that interconfessional exchange of illustrated devotional literature took place in the Republic only if the works first went abroad to pass from Catholic into Protestant hands. Appropriations of *Pia Desideria* did not result from direct contact within the Republic. This prompts us to reconsider the porosity of confessional boundaries in the Dutch Republic. At the very least the permeability or solidity of those boundaries varied, depending on the specific situation observed. In the production of

religious 'mass media' foreign contacts of the same confession seem to have been more productive than interconfessional interactions within the boundaries of the state.

A number of questions inevitably force themselves upon the reader. Why, if interconfessional appropriation did not take place within the borders of the Dutch Republic, was it possible for confessional dividing lines to be crossed in England and Germany? The international detours by which Catholic emblems repeatedly made their way into Protestant pietist literature is among the most interesting aspects of her research. Even if international comparison is beyond the goal she has set herself, these detours nevertheless constitute such vital 'life lines' in her story that it leaves the reader wondering.

What is more, the medical metaphor chosen to characterize the process of appropriation is awkward. Transfusion suggests a degree of engineering and control – 'a reception of *Pia desideria* in the Republic which was *organised* by way of religious transfusions' (46, my emphasis JT) – which does not seem warranted in view of the disparate instances and the capricious rhythm of interconfessional appropriation that the author exposes so well. Moreover, the efficacy of the metaphor depends in part on Dietz' claim that around the same time that Protestant pietists embraced devotional imagery after 1650, Dutch Catholics abandoned visual stimuli (185). Yet such a claim seems to overstrain the evidence she presents. The appearance of several Catholic devotional works in which illustrations play a prominent role, published by Andreas Frisius in Amsterdam in the 1670s, belies her contention. The metaphor threatens to misrepresent the mechanism of cultural exchange which the author has otherwise laid bare in an admirable way.

All in all Dietz' study is meticulously documented and well executed, resulting in a useful contribution to the overall picture of confessional interrelationships in the Dutch Golden Age. Her flexible criteria for identifying appropriations of the Catholic model allow her to include works which have a clear relationship with the original even if they have been thoroughly reworked. This enables her to analyse real transformative processes along the way. She puts her virtuosity in the technical study of the book trade to good use in the identification of authors, editors, printers, and their networks. Finally, her fluent style of writing makes for a good read throughout.

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